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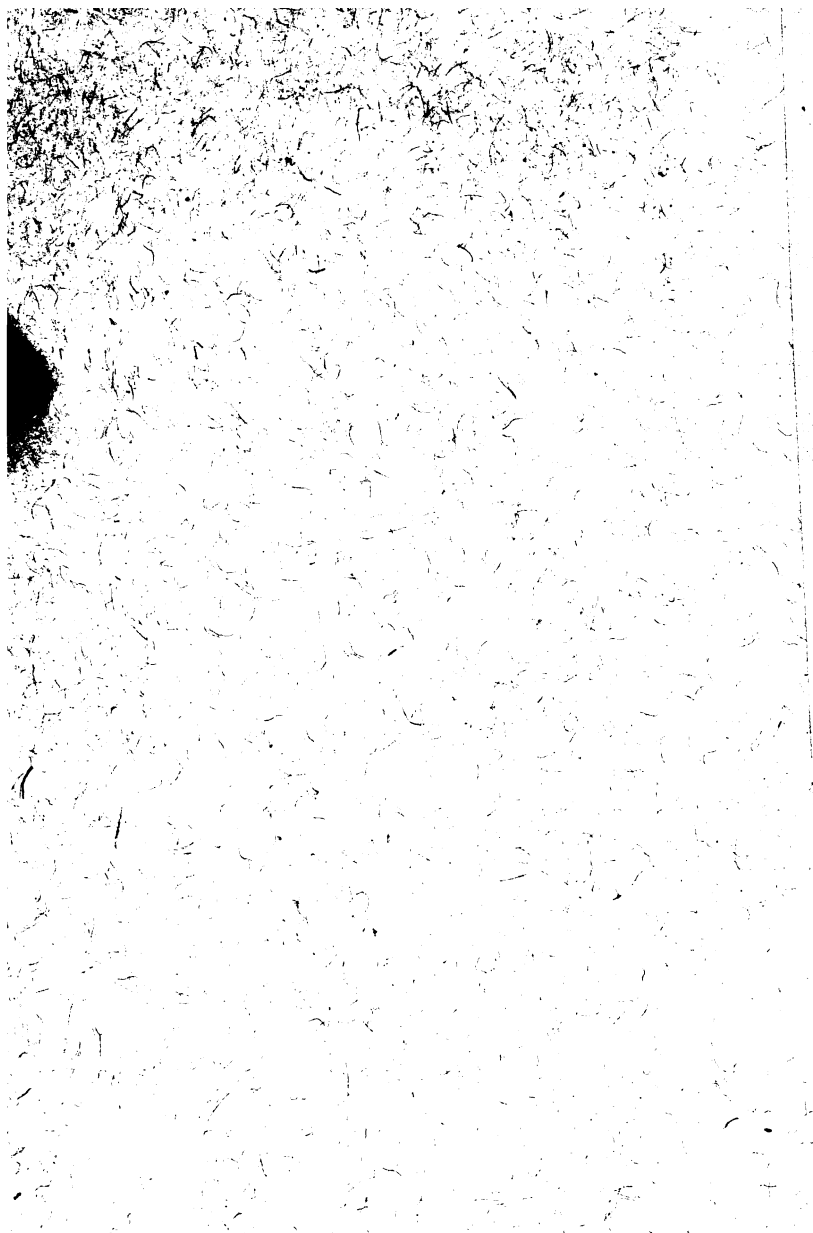
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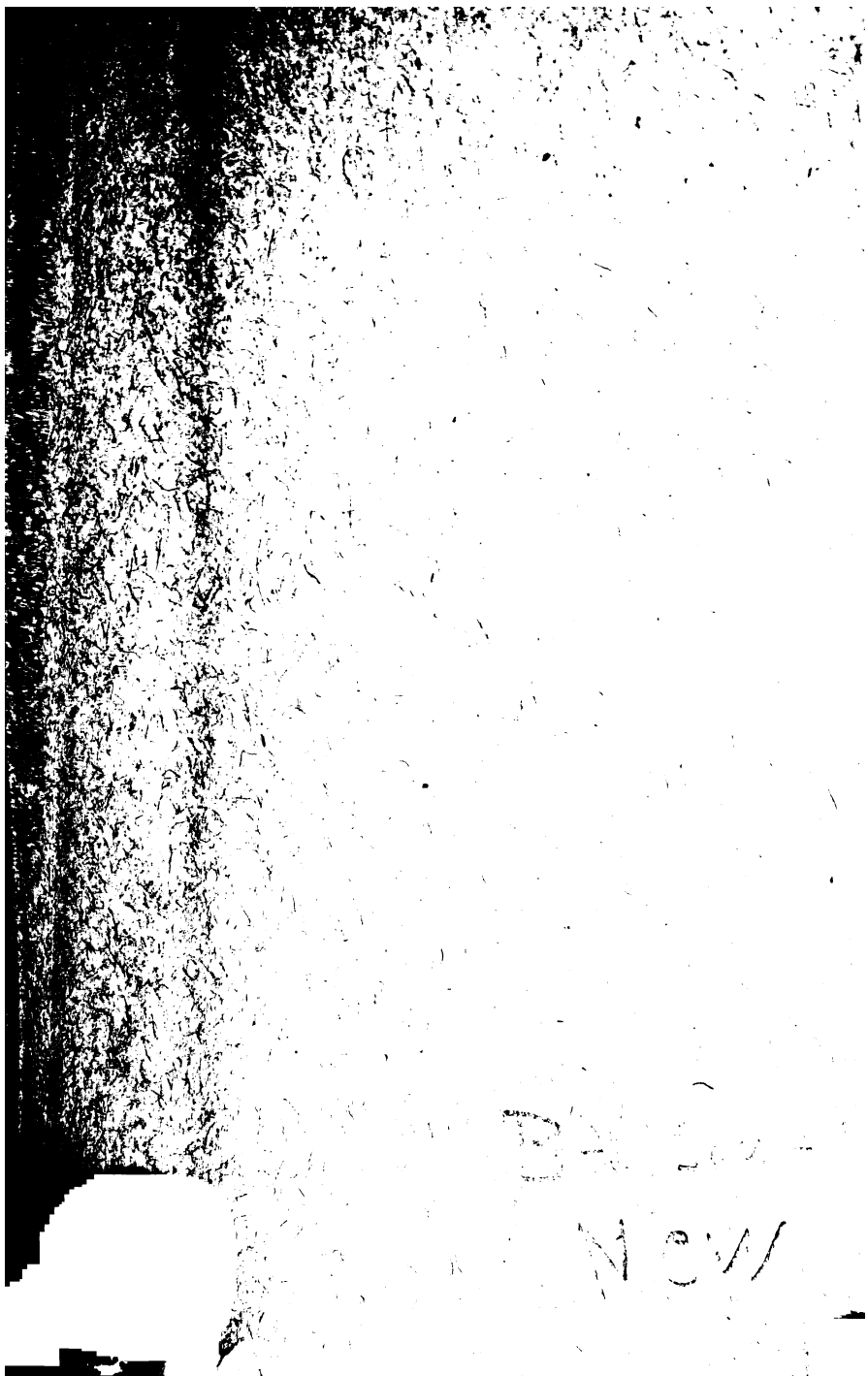
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DR. MIRABEL'S THEORY

A Psychological Study

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ROSS GEORGE DERING

*"Mind and matter," said the lady in the wig, "glide swift into
the vortex of Immensity."—DICKENS*



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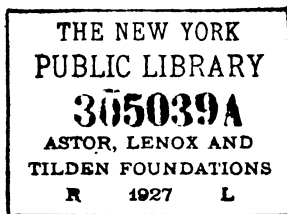
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WYMAN
JULY
WYMAN

DR. MIRABEL'S THEORY

CHAPTER I

PARENTS AND SON

"My dearest Marmaduke!" cried Mrs. Palliser, throwing up both her hands. "I can scarcely believe my ears!"

"Thou—sands of pounds a year," repeated Mr. Palliser, in a portentously impressive voice. "There can be no doubt whatever about the figures. A man in the City told me to-day that Rothschild says there's an enormous fortune in it. It's the biggest thing of modern times. It has only got to be floated to revolutionize the commerce and the social conditions of the whole civilized world. People in general don't know much about it yet, and that's why I've been able to get this promise of an agency for Gerard; but when they do—my word! There'll be such a rush for the shares as we haven't seen since the reign of George the First."

"I never heard of such a thing since I was born!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, in an emphatic staccato. "*What* did you say it was called, Marmaduke?"

"The Universal Warranted Non-Intoxicating Alcoholic Liquor Association," replied Mr. Palliser, *ore rotundo*. "It is based on the most extraordinary discovery ever made in chemistry, by means of which all wines and spirits and malt liquors are rendered absolutely powerless to make any man drunk, however much he swallows, without affecting the flavor in the very slightest degree. Everybody will use it, of course. I shouldn't wonder if a Bill were brought into Parliament rendering the use of it compulsory. Just think of that—think of that—think what that would amount to in a year. How many public-houses are there in England? How many gallons of beer are brewed? How many dozens of wine are

imported annually from the Continent? Well, now, it costs exactly three half-pence, or a fraction under, per gallon, to introduce the anti-intoxicant into the liquor. That is the average. Spirits require more than wine, and wine more than beer. But that's the average. What amount, then, will be required every year to counteract the intoxicating principle in the millions of quarts consumed all over the country? An amount representing a gigantic sum of money. The calculation's as simple as A B C—a simple multiplication sum. And the legislature, of course, will take it up. Every brewer, every wine-merchant, will be forced, under heavy penalties, to introduce the ingredient into every quart of liquor he sells, and the returns to all the original share-holders in the Association will be something fabulous."

"What a *wonderful* thing, Marmaduke!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, quite overcome by the brilliancy of this picture.

"Ah," said Mr. Palliser, shaking his head. "And it'll revolutionize society. Drunkenness will be impossible. A man won't be able to intoxicate himself if he wants to. We live in marvellous times. My word! What would my father have said if he could have heard of such a discovery as this?"

Mr. Palliser was a handsome, gray-headed, elderly gentleman, of commanding presence, and a habit of mouthing his words which imparted much impressiveness to what he said. His wife resembled him in being also handsome, gray-headed, and elderly; but she was still slim in figure, which could scarcely be said of her husband, and withal of an excitable nature, that showed itself in sudden changes of mood—from gayety to depression, from the most sanguine confidence to the depths of a serene despair. She was a very religious woman, yet she never looked more hopelessly miserable than when she was reading the Bible; and though she would weep copiously at a sermon, it required but a very modest quip to set her risual muscles at work again as soon as she found herself enjoying her Sunday dinner.

"What's that you're saying about your father, my dear?" said a very old lady who had not spoken before. Her age was something over eighty, and she was rather deaf; but her eyes were wonderfully good and strong, and she now peered inquiringly over her spectacles in a way that seemed rather to irritate Mr. Palliser.

"Nothing of any consequence, mother," replied that gentleman, with a certain raising of the voice. "We were speaking about a wonderful discovery that has lately been made by a German chem-

ist—a discovery by which it is possible to render alcoholic liquors non-intoxicating, without altering their flavor.”

“And it’s been made into a company, you know,” added Mrs. Palliser, bending towards the old lady so that she might hear the better. “And when once it is started everybody will be obliged to use it by Act of Parliament, and then there will never be any more drunken people in the whole world.”

“Well, that is good news,” commented the old lady, as she resumed her knitting. “I suppose that will be the beginning of the millennium. I am sure we have been waiting for it long enough.”

“And it will be a wonderful opening for Gerard,” continued Mr. Palliser, addressing his wife again. “Of course the operations of the company will extend all over Europe, and agencies will be established in every town. Well, Jerningham, who is the leading man in the whole concern, and has the very greatest influence with the Board of Directors, has promised me that Gerard shall have the agency at Stockholm, with a commission on all business that passes through his hands. There’s probably not a country in all Europe where there’s so much drunkenness as there is in Sweden, and the returns to the agent at Stockholm, at the very lowest computation, will amount to thousands of pounds a year.”

“We certainly do live in extraordinary times,” sighed Mrs. Palliser, leaning back in her chair. “Your mother may well think the millennium’s coming, Marmaduke. But, my dear—is there no special *knowledge* required for a position of this sort? Because, you know, Gerard is not much over twenty-one, and—”

“No knowledge at all,” replied Mr. Palliser. “Except, of course, the simplest counting-house routine. The agency will be extensive enough to require a large staff of clerks, and all Gerard will have to do will be to exercise a general supervision, and issue the necessary orders, and—er—pocket his commissions. It’s the finest chance a young man ever had. He ought to be able to retire with an immense fortune by the time he’s thirty years of age.”

“I hope you’ll be careful and mind what you are about, my dear,” said the old lady in the corner. “I never like companies myself, and never risked a penny in one in my life. Much better get Gerard a good clerkship in the City at ninety pounds a year. That’s how your father began life, my dear, and I don’t suppose you’d say that you are a better business man than he was in his day.”

“You don’t quite understand the affair, mother,” returned Mr.

Palliser, somewhat overbearingly. "This isn't like an ordinary company. When you know more about it—"

"Oh yes, my dear, I know all about it," said the old lady, placidly. "I understand companies very well; that's why I have never invested in one. I always say these little companies are like Jonah's gourd; they spring up one day—"

"But it *isn't* a little company, mother!" almost bellowed Mr. Palliser in his exasperation; "it's an enormous syndicate—a syndicate consisting of some of the very wealthiest men in the wealthiest city in the world!"

"My dear, I know quite as much about these little City companies as *you* do," replied the old lady, with much complacence; "and all I say is, don't risk your money in any one of them, because, you know, my dear, you are not able to afford it."

Mr. Palliser breathed fiercely through his nostrils, closed his mouth hard, and glared round the room in silent fury. The old lady resumed her knitting in cheerful unconsciousness of having said anything to irritate, while Mrs. Palliser assumed a woe-begone expression, as though the crosses and perplexities of life had suddenly reached a pitch too great for humanity to support. The domestic barometer, which only a few moments previously had pointed to Set Fair, was now falling in the direction of Stormy.

It was during these depressing moments that a very welcome diversion occurred. A slow, gentle step was heard outside, and Gerard Palliser quietly entered the room. Slightly over the average height, broad-shouldered and thin in the flank, with a pale complexion, deep blue eyes, and thick dark-brown hair parted in the middle and falling carelessly over his forehead, there could be no doubt that he was an unusually handsome youth. His mother, of course, idolized him; his father was proud of him, too, and determined that he should make a figure in the world—for he was a rather ambitious man—without undergoing the sordid drudgery which falls to the lot of so many. It was his wish that Gerard should burst into full flower at once; the process of putting forth preliminary leaves, and laboring under the disadvantage of the slowly-budding stage, being vicariously intolerable to the mind of this sanguine gentleman. Gerard, on his side, had his ambitions, too; but he seldom spoke of them, and there probably was never a human being more curiously at cross-purposes with those who wished him well than was this strangely constituted youth *quoad* the excellent couple who had the happiness to call him son.

"My dearest Gerard, you've come just in the nick of time!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, all dejection vanishing as if by magic from her countenance. "We were that very moment speaking of you. What do you think? Your father has managed to get a most splendid appointment for you in Sweden. You're going to Stockholm. You'll have an income of some thousands a year from the very first. You're to be agent of the Anti-Intoxication—*what* is the name of the company, did you say, Marmaduke?"

"The Universal Warranted Non-Intoxicating Alcoholic Liquor Association," repeated Mr. Palliser with recovered spirits.

"Exactly," returned Mrs. Palliser. "The operations of the company will be enormous, and the returns simply fabulous, your father says. And you are to be agent in Stockholm, with a commission upon all the business that passes through your hands. It seems to me that your fortune's as good as made."

"Well, what do you think of it, my boy?" asked Mr. Palliser, turning with a triumphant air to Gerard.

"It all sounds very queer," said Gerard, after a pause. "When was this company floated?"

"H'm—well, I don't think it is exactly floated yet," replied Mr. Palliser. "But there'll be a most influential Directorate, and of course they'll know the best time for putting the scheme forward. Very few shares, however, will be offered to the public, I fancy. I think myself uncommonly lucky to have got five hundred pounds' worth privately—as a sort of favor, you know. We needn't trouble ourselves about its being floated."

"And what is the object of it?" inquired Gerard, with as little interest in his voice as though the scheme had no bearing whatever upon his own fortunes.

"My dear, I've already told you," answered Mrs. Palliser, with a touch of impatience in her voice. "It's a wonderful discovery that has been made of some substance, or chemical combination, by means of which all intoxicating properties in spirituous liquors are at once destroyed. Now if you only take the number of gallons of beer that are brewed in England every year, and multiply them by threepence half-penny—that's right, Marmaduke, isn't it?—and then find out the number of public-houses there are in London—"

"Never mind doing all those sums, mother," interposed Gerard, in his low, lazy voice. "It's a German discovery, isn't it?"

"A discovery by one of the first chemists of modern times," said Mr. Palliser, pompously.

"I suppose you mean Hoffmeyer," continued Gerard. "But he certainly isn't one of the first chemists of modern times. I think he is considered rather a quack than otherwise. I know, now, what you mean. He did announce, about a year and a half ago, that he had made some such discovery as you refer to. I remember reading all about it in *Knowledge*. But it was tested, and proved a failure."

"A *failure*?" almost shrieked Mrs. Palliser. "What do you mean, my dear?"

"Well, it was a failure in two ways," replied Gerard, comfortably. "In the first place, the process of manufacture was so expensive as to render the whole thing impossible for common use, and, secondly, it turned the wine quite sour within a fortnight of its introduction. I am surprised to hear that they're trying to bring it forward in London. Its collapse in Germany was complete."

"Most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life!" ejaculated Mr. Palliser, with an indignant glare.

"My dear Gerard, there *must* be a mistake somewhere," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, excitedly. "It's impossible that all these great financiers and people in London can be taking up a scheme that has been proved a failure. It can't be the same thing; or perhaps it has been improved since, you know. It's not likely that your father has been so misled."

"Jerningham told me himself—" began Mr. Palliser in his most ponderous tones.

"Is that the man who edits the *Financial Trumpeter*?" asked Gerard, yawning.

"That's the man," said Mr. Palliser, promptly. "One of the very highest authorities on—"

"I know the name," resumed Gerard. "He was defendant in that bribery case, you know, a few months ago. They proved that he had made fifty thousand pounds by floating companies that all went into liquidation within six months. I don't think I'd go much by what he says if I were you."

Poor Mrs. Palliser gazed distractedly from one to the other, completely at a loss for words. Her husband, unable to meet Gerard's statements, yet wholly unconvinced by them, fumed, puffed, and fretted silently; while Gerard, stepping to the open window, calmly filled his pipe and leaned out to smoke. It was a fair, sweet evening, late in May; the sun was sinking fast, and a

cool, heather-scented breeze came sweeping over Grayshott Common, tumbling the lad's hair and playing havoc with the blue wreaths of his pipe as they curled upward.

"I'm sure I don't know *what* we shall do, Marmaduke, if this is true," said Mrs. Palliser at last. "It 'll be a most awful disappointment. Do you think that Jerningham is such a rascal as Gerard says?"

"He has got five hundred pounds of mine in hard money, anyhow," replied Mr. Palliser, who now began to feel somewhat uncomfortable. "I shall go up to town and see him the first thing to-morrow morning; and if I find that he *has* been jewing me—my word, he may look out for squalls."

"Don't take your check-book, my dear; don't take your check-book, whatever you do," said the old lady in the corner. "Give it to your wife to lock up, or that man will get another five hundred out of you as sure as your name's Marmaduke."

"All right, mother; that 'll do, that 'll do," snapped Mr. Palliser, in not unnatural irritation.

"It's a dreadful trial to one's faith," moaned Mrs. Palliser, looking the very picture of despair. "What wretches there are in the world!" she added, with energy. "It's a most mysterious dispensation that such people are allowed to flourish, and that's all that one can say."

"There'd be no knaves if there were no fools, my dear," said old Mrs. Palliser, cheerfully. "One ought to be careful not to put all the blame on Providence, I sometimes think."

"My dear Mrs. Palliser!" exclaimed the younger lady of that name, horrified at the charge, "I never question the decrees of Providence; I look upon such a thing as most impious presumption. But no one can deny that they are sometimes very mysterious; and then it is that we must just have faith, you know."

"Well, my dear, I don't think we have any of us much reason to complain," replied the old lady, knitting industriously. "I'm sure I never thought that Gerard would have pulled through that illness of his last winter; and yet, you see, there he is, as well as ever he was in his life. Believe me, my dear, we get just as much good as we deserve, and perhaps a little over into the bargain."

"Ah, dear, naughty boy!" said his mother, shaking her head. "I only wish I could get him to see it in the same light."

"What, mother?" asked Gerard, hearing his name mentioned.

"Your grandmother was saying how thankful you ought to be

to Providence for your recovery last January," answered Mrs. Palliser, "when even the doctor had almost given you up. But you know, my dear, you have such strange notions about these things—and you know what a trouble it is to me, Gerard. Don't you feel yourself, now, that a very signal mercy was vouchsafed to us when you took that favorable turn?"

"Vouchsafed by whom?" returned Gerard, slowly puffing out a thin, long stream of smoke.

"My dear," said Mrs. Palliser, decidedly, "there is only One in whose hands are the issues of life and death."

"You mean that God interfered at the last moment to save my life," said Gerard. "The radical change of treatment, and the advice of that London doctor who was called in, had nothing to do with it. I see. Well, if it was God who saved my life, who was it that attacked it? Who made me ill to begin with?"

"My dear Gerard," replied his mother, "we know that all things which happen to us come from the same wise and merciful Providence; and that when He sees fit to lay suffering upon us, and then in His own good time to relieve us of it, it is our duty to acknowledge His mercy and His wisdom, and not to talk in the shocking way about it that you do."

"If a man in the street knocks me down and then picks me up again, I scarcely see why I should *thank* him for it," said Gerard, innocently.

"Gerard!" cried Mrs. Palliser, aghast. "How can you presume to speak like that? It turns my blood quite cold to hear you. Have you no respect for the mysteries of Providence? Can we expect to understand everything that is permitted to befall us?"

"The mysteries of Providence," murmured Gerard, as he thoughtfully pressed down the tobacco in his pipe, "are to the religious world what the glacial epoch is to perplexed geologists. The phrase is a convenient one; it explains everything—and nothing."*

Then he took up a small book, which he carefully put in his pocket, and very slowly left the room, remarking that he thought he would stroll as far as Gibbet Hill. His mother knew and detested that same small book. It was a volume of Matthew Arnold's poems, and to the influence of that author upon her son's mind she attributed everything in his views of life which so distressed and shocked her susceptibilities as a religious woman.

* "Whatever you are *totally* ignorant of assert to be the explanation of everything else." See James's *Psychology*, vol. i. p. 347.

CHAPTER II

HUSBAND AND WIFE

THE worthy people to whom our readers have been introduced in the foregoing chapter stand in no need of any particular description. What they appeared, even to strangers, after a very few moments' conversation, was what they actually were. It required no aid from experience, or insight, or even knowledge of physiognomy, to form a correct estimate of their characters. Simple-minded, sanguine, confiding, and incurably imprudent, Mr. Palliser was an object of perpetual anxiety to his friends; while his wife, unluckily, had just as much confidence in his supposed shrewdness, judgment, and knowledge of the world as he himself, poor man, had in the honesty of—say Mr. Jerningham. He was a country-gentleman of moderate fortune, and amiable disposition in the main; but his amiability was somewhat infected by a certain arrogance of speech and manner, while his fortune had suffered, more or less, from his persistent belief in the honesty of the various Jerninghams who occasionally crossed his path.

It was, indeed, difficult to understand how such a couple could be the parents of a boylike Gerard. He was in all respects their opposite. Where they were sanguine, he was critical; where they were enthusiastic, he was cold; where they were credulous, hasty, eager to regard as certain whatever they happened to desire, he played the sceptic and the devil's advocate. We have just seen with what complete sang-froid he toppled over the imposing castle in the air which was the latest of his father's feats in this branch of architecture; and this incident was characteristic of them both. But underlying this mental peculiarity, repellent in one so young, there lurked other traits which did more than redeem his character from the charge of churlishness or want of sympathy.

Watch him now, as he strides slowly through the heather with the soft cool breeze blowing in his face, and his hands carelessly thrust into the side-pockets of his loose jacket. Not a shade of annoyance or disappointment can be traced upon his features; the

thought of his father's glowing promises has crossed his mind, it is true, but only to be dismissed with a passing smile, born of a certain half-affectionate, half-compassionate disdain. "Poor dear old Sir Gullible!" he murmured to himself, and forthwith dismissed the subject. If his fortune were to be made, it would scarcely be by such a very royal road as that. And Gerard was not ambitious of a fortune constructed of commissions on the sale of beer, non-intoxicating or the reverse. Whatever fortune might come to him should be moulded in a higher sphere of action altogether. It was not entirely clear to him that life, of itself, was worth much after all; but if it had to be lived, then let him at any rate do something to solve its deeper problems, to place the rule of right upon an impregnable foundation, to sweep away the cobwebs that for so long had obscured the moral vision of mankind, and eventually to leave the world a wiser and a happier place for his having lived in it. We have most of us cherished far less noble dreams than his; and ideals, be they high or low, form more than the half of life.

In a short time he reached the top of Gibbet Hill, and stood for a moment gazing at the wonderful stretch of undulating, richly-wooded country which lay spread out beneath him. Then he turned round, and walked up to the stone obelisk which commemorates the punishment suffered on that spot by the murderers of the unwary sailor. The story was of course familiar to him, and for the hundredth time he read the beautiful though strangely inappropriate inscriptions on the column, musingly:

*"Post Tenebras Lux.
In Luce Spes.
Post Obitum Salus.
In Obitu Paz."*

"Ah!" said Gerard, softly. "I wonder." He threw himself upon the grass, drew the little volume from his pocket, and turned over its pages with the gesture of one by whom they were well known and greatly loved. "Who can be sure of anything?" he thought; and then he read, in a low voice, the passage which first turned up.

*"Hath man no second life? Pitch this one high!
Sits there no Judge in Heaven, our sin to see?
More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!
Was Christ a man like us? Ah! let us try
If we then, too, can be such men as he!"*

"It's very curious," soliloquized Gerard. "Somehow I never open Matthew Arnold without finding a passage bearing upon my own thoughts at the time. What better answer could any one have given me now? He was the wisest of men. We none of us know anything, but he knew that he didn't know, and his teaching is the wisest and the safest of all."

He was lying near the verge of the hill, just where it sinks abruptly and precipitously to the plain beneath; and as he raised his eyes to the far horizon his field of vision was suddenly invaded by a discordant object, something that at first sight looked like a barn-door fowl, moving along the grassy edge in front of him. The next moment he saw that it was a woman's hat, weighted somewhat profusely with feathers; and as the path below took an upward curve, the head supporting it came into view. It was that of a young woman—a lady—of seven or eight and twenty years of age, fashionably dressed in a trim tailor-made costume, and, in spite of her fluttering hat, undeniably good-looking. She had fine, firmly-cut features, bright, clear eyes, and a remarkably decided mouth; she walked with a strong, resolute step, and a gait more distinguished, perhaps, for freedom than for grace. It was impossible to ignore the fact that she was a handsome person in her way; but equally impossible not to experience a certain sense of disappointment in regarding her—a sense that there was something lacking, without which it would be difficult to call her beautiful. She was too bright, too striking, too hard.

Gerard, who recognized her, closed his book, rose to his feet, and lifted his hat slightly. The next moment she had turned the crest of the hill and stood in front of him.

"You look quite surprised to see me, Mr. Palliser," she said, in a clear penetrating voice, as they shook hands.

"I suppose I was scarcely expecting to see anybody here just now," returned Gerard. "You seemed to be coming out of the ground. Have you been a long walk?"

"Pretty well," replied the lady. "I think it would do you good if you were to walk more than you do, instead of lying about the place in a perpetual dream. What's that book you have with you?"

"Do you know it?" said Gerard, smiling, as he showed it her.

"Yes, I know it," replied Madame Mirabel; for the lady was a married lady. "I suppose you admire Matthew Arnold. He's well enough—for a certain stage of development."

"What stage do you mean?" asked Gerard, put on his mettle at once.

"A rather immature stage," said Madame Mirabel, with a slight laugh. "Don't be angry; we most of us pass through it. Do you like him very much?"

"I more than like him," answered Gerard. "I think he is the wisest man I have ever read. And his style is as perfect as his thoughts."

"I don't criticise his style," replied Madame Mirabel; "but surely it is too much to say that his thoughts are perfect. No man can think perfectly who does not think exactly; and an exact thinker Arnold certainly was not. I should call him a sentimentalist. True, he had escaped from the net-work of superstition in which he was brought up, but there he remained, his intellect forbidding him to go back, his transcendentalism preventing him from accepting the logical results of his convictions. In short, you might almost call him a religionist. His position was entirely untenable."

"Arnold a religionist!" exclaimed Gerard, deprecatingly.

"Give me the book," said Madame Mirabel. "Ah, it's almost too dark to see. Look at this line, now. What does he mean by talking about our souls being soothed and encouraged by the 'Eternal Father's smile' after we are dead? Or here, again:

"Children of men! the Unseen Power, whose eye
Forever doth accompany mankind,
Hath looked on no religion scornfully
That men did ever find.
Which has not taught weak wills how much they can?
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain?
Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man—
Thou must be born again!"

And you call that man an exact thinker. I call him a poet, a supernaturalist; almost—though I don't want to hurt your feelings—almost a theologian. And theology is not a subject which interests me."

"I don't think it's fair to taunt Arnold with being a theologian because he uses Christian metaphors and terminology," remarked Gerard, feeling rather sore. "I read him differently, and he never grates upon me in that way. He could never be the help he is to me if he did."

"Much better read Clifford, and Haeckel, and Maudsley," said

Madame Mirabel, as they turned to walk back together. "There you are in the region of solid fact. I was reading an article by some French doctor this morning on microbes, and that is one reason why I have come out to get my lungs full of oxygen now. Nothing like ozone when you have been in a sick-room all day."

"Ah! I forgot," said Gerard, simply. "I am so sorry. Is Dr. Mirabel no better?"

"He never will be any better, Mr. Palliser," said the wife, with a sudden catching of her breath. "He is—I am afraid it is consumption," she added, in a lower tone. "The most that I or anybody can do is to lessen his sufferings as much as possible. The disease has gone too far to be arrested now."

"I am greatly shocked to hear it," replied Gerard, awe-struck in spite of himself. "To be in possession of all one's senses, and yet to be looking forward to certain death within a measurable time—one can scarcely realize it. And I need scarcely say how deeply I feel for you."

"It's harder for me than for him," said Madame Mirabel, calmly. "My husband is perfectly cheerful, and is making all sorts of plans for his new stage of existence, as he calls it—poor Gaston! You know he has strange theories about the continuity of experience," said Madame Mirabel, compassionately, "and contends they are deducible from science. And he has had so much pain all his life that it would be wanton cruelty to prove to him what chimeras all such notions are. Why deny him his few more months of happiness? He will never know that it is all a delusion. Yes, he is happy enough in spite of his sufferings; whereas I—well, as you know, I don't believe in it, of course, and it is rather an overwhelming thought that we shall soon be separated—and forever."

Gerard thought that, under the circumstances, she certainly was the more to be pitied, and could not sufficiently admire the heroic calmness with which she confronted her fate. But he pitied her dying husband, too; and, not being by any means so dogmatic as the uncompromising young woman beside him, caught himself thinking of Dr. Mirabel's "delusion" more leniently than he might have done at any other time. That she was almost unnaturally cold and hard only occurred to him for a moment; the next, he saw in her demeanor nothing but the finest self-repression, the most consistent carrying out, under severe tests, of her scientific creed; and he pitied her all the more that her creed was such a harsh one. But then—if it were true?

"I would sooner share your husband's belief than yours, Madame Mirabel," he said at last.

"No doubt," replied the prospective widow, readily. "We are all selfish, and the desire for immortality is selfishness pure and simple. People do not understand this; if they did, they would be much happier than they actually are. It is religious delusion, fostered by religious selfishness, which lies at the root of most human discontent, and the world will never be really happy and restful until it finds this out. Theology is right so far—there is a peace which passeth understanding; but no theology will ever give it you. I myself, for instance, never knew what peace was until I had got rid of every vestige of desire to become a Christian. No really scientifically moral man can desire a future life. Even individual existence entails a certain subtle selfishness of its own, here and now. But you were contrasting my husband's belief on the subject and my own. What is yours?"

"I have none," said Gerard, simply. "I merely don't know."

"There is a sort of agnosticism," remarked Madame Mirabel, pointedly, "a feeble, flaccid thing, which has in it, to use Tyndall's words, the 'promise and potency' of theological religion itself. Some even of our foremost thinkers are tainted with it. It is observable in Tyndall himself—in Herbert Spencer even—while it is actually rampant in John Stuart Mill. Read his Posthumous Essays. How that man's mind must have degenerated in his later life! And I recognize the very same instability in you, Mr. Palliser. No man with a truly scientific mind would find comfort and teaching in such a writer as Matthew Arnold. Put him away, Mr. Palliser, and if you must read poetry, read Gerard Massey. His sun-myth theory of the origin of the Christian legend is interesting, though not scientifically proved."

Gerard made no answer.

"You have not been to see us for some time," resumed Madame Mirabel, after a pause. "Won't you come in now? My husband would be so glad to see you."

"Certainly I will," said Gerard, rather surprised. "Of course you understand that I had no idea he was so ill. Are you sure he will be able to see me?"

"Quite sure," replied Madame Mirabel, with a sudden smile. "I believe it will do him good."

"Then of course I'll come," said Gerard; and fell into a fit of musing.

They walked on for the next ten minutes without resuming the topic of their conversation, and soon afterwards arrived at Gorse Cottage. It may be as well to state here that the Mirabels were comparatively new residents in the neighborhood. The doctor, a bright, clever young Frenchman of some five-and-thirty years of age, had formerly been medical officer at one of the Legations in the East, where he had met, and married, the English girl who was now his wife. Her beauty had attracted, as her originality had dazzled, him; and when the state of his health necessitated his retirement from the service, they both accepted the advice of an eminent physician to try a bracing climate. Unfortunately, however, the disease had been either neglected too long, or was of too virulent a nature, to yield to ordinary treatment; and the consequence was that, after the poor young doctor had been at Hindhead for six months, it was generally recognized that the chances of his restoration to health were exceedingly remote.

"Gaston, I have brought Mr. Gerard Palliser in to see you," said Madame Mirabel, as they entered.

There was no mistaking his complaint. He had the bright, restless, hollow eyes, and thin, hectic cheeks of a man far gone in consumption, and as he turned uneasily in his arm-chair at the sound of his wife's voice a fit of coughing seized him which prevented his replying for some seconds. Gerard waited quietly till it was over, and then, advancing to his side, said:

"I am so sorry to hear you have been suffering so much of late. I would have come to see you earlier had I known of it."

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Gerard!" exclaimed the sick man, breaking out into a smile that irradiated his whole face. "Yes, you are very good to come. I am sick—ah, yes, sick unto death. But we will not talk of that. What for should we speak about it? It is kismet—*voilà tout*. And the subject is not an agreeable one. You have been walking with my wife?"

"I met Madame Mirabel at Gibbet Hill, and she brought me in," said Gerard, taking a seat beside him.

"That was very good of her," replied Dr. Mirabel, in his hollow tones. "I think I should like to be buried on Gibbet Hill; it is a fine airy place. Bah! I again forget. We will not anticipate. And you, my dear Monsieur Gerard; how goes it with you? How 'wags the world,' as you English say?"

"Thanks—much as usual," said Gerard, feeling a reluctance to talk about himself in the presence of a man so circumstanced.

"Ah, yes—it is fine to be young and strong," gasped the sufferer. "And what's the news outside?"

Gerard mentioned one or two trifles of local interest which he thought might amuse him. He was right; the doctor broke into the gayest laughter, cut short the moment afterwards by a strangling cough.

"Ah, bah!" he whispered, throwing himself back when the fit had passed, "there are times, you see, when even to laugh is an expensive luxury. But what worth is life without laughing? Your Thomas More died laughing; a noble death, Monsieur Gerard. *Hein?* Then there was Heine. Ah, Heine. He was no German. He was a Frenchman to the core of his heart. You have read Heine? The more he suffered the more he laughed. People say he was half Jew, half Greek. Well, then, that is how a true Frenchman is composed. You have read him—*hein?*"

"Yes, I have read him," answered Gerard. "You know what has been said of him by an English critic?"

"English critic of Heine?" exclaimed Dr. Mirabel, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "No! I have never seen. I cannot imagine your English people reading Heine—I mean reading the man himself, not his writings. They could not understand even the alphabet of him. Well, tell me; what does the English critic say?"

"I have it here," said Gerard, taking his *vade mecum* out of his pocket. "It occurs in a poem on Heine's grave.

"The Spirit of the world,
Beholding the absurdity of men—
Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile
For one short moment wander o'er his lips:
That smile was Heine's."

"But that is superb—superb!" exclaimed Dr. Mirabel in his astonishment. "I beg your pardon, my dear Monsieur Gerard; I beg everybody's pardon. But the man who wrote that was no Englishman; no, he was a Greek. What was his name? Ah, I have much to learn, and there is no time to lose. Please let me see that book."

Gerard, flushing with pleasure, handed him the volume, which the sick man scanned eagerly.

"It is a great favorite of mine," he said, as he watched the other's interest. "I always find what I want in it—something

bearing upon the subject I happen to be thinking of at any moment. Let me leave it with you. I'm sure you'll enjoy reading it."

"I accept, I accept," said the Frenchman, gayly. "Oh yes, I shall like it very much. When you are going a long journey, *mon cher*, the chief thing is to take everything you are likely to want on the way. If you arrive at your destination empty-handed, you will find yourself in a fix, and you will think, Ah, the fool I was; why did I not pack my portmanteau properly before I started?"

Gerard looked a little puzzled.

"You don't understand, *hein?*" pursued Dr. Mirabel, sinking his voice with a view to economizing his strength. "But it is very simple. We must all go a long journey some day. Well, what do you do before you go on a journey: pack up, don't you? *Voyons donc*: life is the time to pack; and this process of packing is what we call study, education, learning all that can be known about the minds of others and the universe around us. For instance: in your lifetime you study the construction of the heavens, the history of the earth, the evolution of species, the progress of humanity—or what else you please. At last you die; the separation takes place; you are—what I call—set free. Then come the grand opportunities. Then you are admitted to the other side of the curtain. Then you may discover the secrets of the nature. You may watch worlds in the course of development, in the course of decay. You may follow the rush of a system or a galaxy through space. You may assist at the parturition of a sun, and be spectator of the intellectual evolutions of some humans in another planet. Ah, what a prospect! But how, if you are ignorant when the time comes? How, if you have never studied astronomy, or mathematics, or physiology, or psychology, or politics? Shall you not be at a disadvantage? But of course; you are like a traveller who has come unprovided with what is necessary for him on his journey, and no knowledge of the language of the new country."

"And you are really looking forward to all that?" asked Gerard, with a wrinkle of perplexity upon his brow.

"*Mais oui!*" replied the young doctor. "I cannot give you all the explications now; but another day, another day, you know. You see, my wife believe not these things. She is *matérialiste*; she say, 'After death—nothing.' But I am also *matérialiste*; and I tell her, 'Julie, you understand not the facts you deal with. You draw wrong conclusions from premises I do not dispute.' Yet she

will have her way. *Dieu*, they are all like that. They are all charming, but they will have their ways."

Gerard smiled. "Your theory is a very attractive one," he said, cautiously. "It would be a great thing if its truth could be really proved."

"It can be proved," replied Dr. Mirabel; "I can prove it to you. But not to-day. And there is more—oh, much more. Ah! there is my wife. Julie, you did well to bring Monsieur Gerard to see me. He has done me—how do you say?—no end of goodness. He has an open mind. Here is a little book he lend me which I shall prefer even to—"

"Gaston, you must not excite yourself," interposed his wife in her clear tones. "I fear you've been talking too much. You must rest now. I'm going to bring you some boiled custard, and then it will be time for you to go to bed."

"Ah, *cruelle!*" said her husband, playfully. "Well, if it must be so it must. She always treat me like that, Monsieur Gerard; she is a tyrant, a despot. You are going? So soon?"

"I must, indeed," said Gerard, rising. "My people will be wondering where I am."

"I think he had better leave you now," said Madame Mirabel, "or you will be too much excited to sleep."

"Well then, *au revoir*," assented the patient, clasping Gerard's strong young hand in his thin, nervous fingers. "You have made me great pleasure this evening, *mon ami*, and I am very thankful to you. When will you come again?"

"He shall come again as soon as ever you feel strong enough to see him," replied Madame Mirabel. "You will, won't you?" she added, as Gerard took his leave.

"You may rely upon it," he said; and left the room with her.

She stopped him for a moment in the hall. "You see how he is," she said, in a subdued voice. "You have cheered him wonderfully; but of course all excitement is bad for him. You will come again, won't you? The strain upon me is very great—greater than you might imagine. A quiet visit from you every now and then would be a relief to *both* of us. You won't forget?"

"Indeed I won't," Gerard assured her. Then, instead of letting him out, she hesitated.

"I wanted to ask you something," she said, with slightly less self-possession than usual. "Did I strike you as being rather hard this evening—I mean, when we were out?"

"A—a little, I think," replied Gerard; and then he colored vividly under her gaze. "But only at first. The next moment I was admiring your fortitude. I think it is—almost—sublime."

"Thank you," said Madame Mirabel. "I like people to be honest. And I'm *not* hard—in reality. That is all."

The one touch—the touch of something like softness, womanliness, feeling—which had up till then been wanting to make her really beautiful, lit up her eyes as she spoke. She seemed a different being. Then she opened the door, and he went out into the starlight.

CHAPTER III

MADEMOISELLE LA FUTURE

MR. PALLISER, when in an equable frame of mind, had a certain airy, open, gracious, and withal country-gentleman sort of manner which went far to make him a very agreeable man to meet. He rather prided himself upon his easy flow of conversation, and his familiarity with what he called "the topics of the day"; and if his views upon such matters were not particularly deep, they were always well and pleasantly expressed. He was a good talker, and, being naturally disposed to the embellishment, if not exaggeration, of the incidents he recounted, an interesting one; so variegated, indeed, was his repertory, that he was seldom known to relate an anecdote the same way twice; from which it may be inferred that he had a very exuberant imagination, richly cultivated. It must be confessed, however, that when he arrived at home again, the evening after that on which our story opens, from his expedition to the City, he wore a taciturn and somewhat crestfallen expression, as of a man whose calculations have somehow turned out wrong.

He found three ladies waiting dinner for him in the drawing-room, with two of whom we are already acquainted. The third was a certain Miss Rose Chattering, the daughter of a neighboring gentleman of that name, and the object of no small affection on the part of Mrs. Palliser the younger. Nor was it surprising that such should have been the case, for dear Rosie was one of the most perfectly charming young ladies in Hampshire. She could play "The Trout," and "The Carnaval de Venise," and Heller's "Promenades d'un Solitaire" very prettily upon the piano; she went to church every Sunday in a decorous church-going bonnet, and whispered the responses out of a beautiful gilt-edged prayer-book; she thought that croquet was a much nicer and more lady-like game than lawn-tennis; she loved an occasional novel, and was a great student of *London Society* and *Belgravia*; poetry, too, she affected, in mild doses, though she had never heard of Ros-

setti, and held a decided opinion (based on a remark of Mrs. Grant's, the rector's wife) that the poems of Mr. Swinburne were "horrid"; and she instinctively regarded everything that was unusual, unconventional, and unfamiliar to her, as something to be carefully eschewed. Added to all which she was a most excellent daughter to papa and mamma—obedient, dutiful, and affectionate; and Mrs. Palliser, who had no daughters of her own and was charmed with dear Rosie's instinctive refinement and propriety, had secretly elected her as the most suitable wife in the world for her son Gerard.

Mr. Palliser entered the room, as already mentioned, with a somewhat preoccupied and cloudy brow. He welcomed Rosie, however, very heartily; and appeared quite pleased when dear Rosie tripped neatly across the room to meet him, offering him her cheek to kiss. Then he sat down with the air of a man who had had a fatiguing day.

"Well, my dear?" said Mrs. Palliser, interrogatively, with an anxious look.

"Well," replied Mr. Palliser, rather slowly. "I saw Jerningham."

"And what does he say?" pursued his wife, as he paused.

"He says," rejoined Mr. Palliser, "that the company is perfectly sound, that nearly the entire capital has been subscribed or promised, and that the discovery itself—the anti-intoxicant—has been proved a complete success. And he seemed so—well, so hurt at my apparent distrust, that he offered to take my shares back at the price I paid for 'em. He offered me a check for the full amount, this very morning, in his own office."

"Which of course you accepted at once," put in the old lady, knitting industriously as usual.

"My dear mother," replied Mr. Palliser, with a crushing look, which however, was quite lost upon its object, "there are certain canons of honor among business men that you are probably not aware of, but which render any such course of action on my part quite impossible. If I had accepted Jerningham's offer I should never have been able to do any business with him again."

"And that would have been a great misfortune, I suppose," said the old lady, in the most innocent way possible. "I dare say this gentleman's code of honor is a very strict one, and I must say I think he gave you a fair chance."

"Then the affair is going on all right, Marmaduke?" asked

Mrs. Palliser, seeing her husband fume under the old lady's tongue. "When will they commence operations, do you suppose?"

"Well—there seems to be a sort of temporary *hitch* about that," acknowledged Mr. Palliser. "I can't quite make out what the real difficulty is—something about registration, I fancy. And there's some delay just now about the appointment of bankers to the affair. We shall hear more about it, no doubt, in a day or two."

"I *cannot* understand it!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, appealing to the world at large in her perplexity. "Yesterday everything was all right, everything was going on swimmingly; and to-day there are nothing but hitches. I never heard of anything like it since I was born."

To Rosie the whole affair seemed very mysterious and important; entirely out of the range of her own little interests and experiences; so she sat quite still, and, without understanding in the least what it was about, put on a pretty little air of troubled sympathy. She laid her hand on Mrs. Palliser's, and Mrs. Palliser, eager to take somebody else into her confidence, was just about to tell Rosie the whole story—enormous operations, fabulous returns, number of gallons consumed in England every year multiplied by threepence half-penny, the greatest discovery of modern times, and every other feature of it, all inclusive—when luckily dinner was announced. And, with dinner, came Gerard; the result of the combination being that Mrs. Palliser soon forgot her grievances and rose into her most cheerful vein.

"Well, Gerard, and what have you been doing with yourself to-day?" asked his father, when they were seated at table. The honest gentleman was partly relieved, but partly nettled, at the absence of any reference on Gerard's part to the business that had occupied him in the City; and wondered whether his son's reticence was prompted by a lack of interest in the subject, or a feeling of delicacy towards himself.

"I was reading at first," said Gerard; "and then I walked to Linford."

"Gerard is such a boy for reading," remarked Mrs. Palliser, turning to Rosie; "he's scarcely ever without a book of some sort in his hand. He takes after me in that," said the good lady, complacently. "I have been reading such a sweet book lately, by Frederika Bremer—you ought to read it, my dear. She is such a lovely writer! But dear Gerard's tastes are rather different, I am afraid. What were you reading to-day, Gerard dear?"

"Rabelais," replied Gerard, briefly.

"Is Rabelais a book?" inquired Rosie.

"It is," said Gerard, with an Oxford smile. "In the sense that Byron is a book. He was a French—clergyman."

"Indeed," said Rosie. "Mamma has been reading a book by a French clergyman, too. His name was Pressensé. I must tell her about this one."

"Do," said Gerard, with his gravest air. "Rabelais is a most improving writer. But I would suggest that your mamma read it in the original. She would probably appreciate it more that way than in a translation."

"Oh yes, mamma is very fond of reading French," said Rosie, innocently. "I have been trying to read a novel lately called *Esmond*. Have you ever heard of it? But it was dreadfully stupid and uninteresting, and I soon had to give it up. I can't remember who it was by."

"A person of the name of Thackeray, I believe," replied Gerard. "An obscure writer, now dead. He wrote two or three other novels in his time, and there are a few people, I have heard, who consider *Esmond* his most successful effort."

Rosie shrugged her shoulders pityingly. Mr. Palliser chuckled, and said, "Never you mind, Rosie; we can't all think alike, can we?"—while Mrs. Palliser got visibly uneasy, and tried to turn the conversation into smoother channels. She did not like to hear Gerard chaffing Rosie so unmercifully; it was a bad omen for the success of her cherished plan.

"Are you going to London for a few weeks this year, Rosie?" she said.

"I don't think so," replied Rosie. "Mamma doesn't like London in the summer. She says it's so noisy and so hot."

"It was charming there three weeks ago," said Mrs. Palliser. "I went up, you know, to do some shopping, and to attend some of the May meetings; and oh, my dear, I did so wish you could have been with us! They were quite heavenly, some of them. And then there are such lovely, sweet preachers in London; and such beautiful singing at some of the churches. Dear Mr. Nightingale preached for an hour and ten minutes the Sunday morning before we came away. You know we'd been rather naughty the night before; we had been to the opera to hear 'Faust.' Music is my one temptation. But oh, my dear, I forgot all about it the next morning; the whole thing seemed to vanish. Wasn't it a wonderful sermon, Marmaduke?"

"Mother," said Gerard, "I do think you're the most dissipated woman I ever knew."

"Gerard!" almost shrieked Mrs. Palliser, horrified. "My dearest boy, what in the world will you say next?"

"I call it dissipation," said Gerard, perfectly unmoved. "All that sort of thing is to you what balls and theatres are to other people. I'm sure it can't do you any good. You never look so utterly woe-begone as when you have just been to church; and all that excitement must be very bad for your digestion. It's that that keeps you so thin."

This was a singularly unkind remark, for if the excellent lady had a touch of vanity it was on account of her slim figure. Mr. Palliser, with the best will in the world, could not keep himself from laughing.

"I think that a little more church-going wouldn't do *you* any harm, my dear," retorted Mrs. Palliser, with spirit. "Ah, it's all very well to joke, but it's no joking matter, let me tell you, Gerard. I can't imagine where you got such notions from; certainly not from me, or from your father either."

"Peculiarities have been known to skip a generation," remarked her son, mildly.

"A very neat compliment to me," put in the old lady, speaking for the first time. "I only hope you'll do me credit, my dear, as you grow older."

"Seen anything of your friends the Mirabels lately, Gerard?" asked Mr. Palliser, helping himself to claret.

"I was there yesterday," said Gerard.

"Do you know the Mirabels?" asked Rosie, turning with a slightly surprised air to Mrs. Palliser.

"Well, dear," replied that correct lady, with a deprecating air, "only very slightly. They are more Gerard's friends than ours. Of course they are scarcely the sort of people one generally meets. They don't go to church, you see; and—well, you know, dear, I don't think they're very good style. There's something rather un-English about them, if you understand what I mean."

"I don't think that Dr. Mirabel professes to be very English, does he, mother?" said Gerard, with a touch of that smooth-cheekiness which every now and then characterized his utterances.

"My dear, don't be absurd," replied Mrs. Palliser. "Of course I know that he's a Frenchman; but it wasn't that I meant at all. And certainly it's nobody's fault but her own that his wife is what she is."

"Quite true, my dear," remarked Mr. Palliser, with an ironical bow. "Madame Mirable is an exceptionally handsome woman; and certainly the fact is not due to any efforts on the part of other members of her sex. She'd no doubt have been plain enough if they had had the making of her."

"I think she must be rather horrid," said Rosie. "Mamma doesn't like her at all, I know."

"Ah, we all know what a Lothario *you* used to be, Marmaduke," retorted Mrs. Palliser, in her sprightliest mood. "Such a lady-killer," turning with a laugh to Rosie. "I was his fifteenth!"

"Seventeenth, my dear," corrected Mr. Palliser.

"There you are, you see," resumed his wife, gayly. "And he even admires Madame Mirabel. But surely, Marmaduke, you can't say that she is good style?"

"There are fashions in style, my dear," replied Mr. Palliser, with cheerful evasiveness. "Mirabel himself I don't know much of; I believe he's a very clever fellow in his way, but it's not exactly *my* way. He's eccentric, and I can't bear eccentricity in any shape."

"I've always understood that he's rather horrid, too," said Rosie, "but not so much so as his wife."

"In what way is he horrid, Miss Chattering?" asked Gerard, as though for information.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Rosie, vaguely; "different from other people, I suppose, and all that sort of thing. At any rate, we never visit them. Mamma is very strict about such matters, and she always says the Mirabels are not exactly—er—"

"I see," said Gerard.

"Mirabel looks very ill," remarked Mr. Palliser. "The place doesn't seem to have done much for him. How is he just now, Gerard?"

"He's dying fast," replied his son.

"My dear Gerard!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, greatly shocked. "Dying? Are you sure?"

"Quite," said Gerard.

"What an awful thing!" said Mrs. Palliser, looking the very picture of misery. "I'm sure I don't know what his religion is. I don't suppose he has any, unhappy man. I wonder whether Mr. Grant, now, wouldn't go and see him. What a frightful state of mind he must be in!"

"Who—Mirabel?" asked Gerard. "Not in the very least. He's a great deal more cheerful than you often are, mother."

"Cheerful!" echoed Mrs. Palliser. "How can a man be cheerful with such an appalling prospect before him? He must be mad, my dear—raving mad. It's terrible to think of. How can an infidel be *cheerful* on his death-bed? Ah, my dear, I have read too much to believe that. He may be cheerful now, because he doesn't realize his position; but when the time comes, when there is no longer any opportunity"—and Mrs. Palliser, unable to conclude, shut her eyes, and swayed her head from side to side in a manner that implied volumes.

"He is cheerful, nevertheless," said Gerard. "He looks forward to death almost with eagerness. I'm very sorry, mother, to upset any theory of yours, and so, I am sure, would Mirabel himself be; he's a very courteous fellow. But still, facts are facts; and I can only tell you that he bears his sufferings heroically, and anticipates his release with the most perfect good-humor and satisfaction."

"Release!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, with a slight shudder.

"Does he believe in a future life?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"He does—most obdurately," replied Gerard, with a smile that increased his mother's perplexity.

"But is he a *Christian*, Gerard?" she asked.

"I should say certainly not," said Gerard.

"And yet he believes in a future life, and even looks forward to it with *pleasure*?" pursued Mrs. Palliser, in astonishment.

"So he tells me," answered Gerard, quietly.

"I never heard of such a thing since I was born!" ejaculated the good lady, gazing round the room in her despair of understanding such a paradox.

"Judging by your own account, mother," remarked Gerard, "I should say that the things you have never heard of since you were born would make a considerable library."

Mrs. Palliser tried to look indignant; but, catching sight of Rosie's open eyes and her husband's ill-concealed amusement, she gave it up, and broke into convulsive laughter.

"You're a naughty, undutiful boy, Gerard!" she exclaimed, "to make such game of your old mother. Why, Rosie looks quite scandalized. Never mind, Rosie dear; you don't know Gerard yet. I wouldn't wish for a better son, though he is such an impertinent boy sometimes."

"I can't think what mamma would say if I were to talk to her like that," said Rosie, glancing at Gerard with a look of shy reproof.

"I expect you haven't trained your mamma up in the way she should go," said Mr. Palliser, with a genial smile.

"You see that Gerard has given us a better education, dear Rosie," said Mrs. Palliser, laughing. "I often try my best to be angry with him, but it's no use. He's quite incorrigible, and we must just take him as he is."

"Well, mother," remarked the object of these criticisms, "I think it very possible that you might like the Mirabels rather better if you knew them more. They're rather original, and that of itself is interesting."

"My dear, I'm afraid I don't like original people," confessed Mrs. Palliser. "I've an instinctive shrinking from people who are different from everybody else, even putting graver considerations aside. They always seem to me not exactly—nice."

"But you're very original yourself, mother," said Gerard, serenely. "You don't imagine that you're a conventional person, do you?"

"Well, my dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Palliser, bristling. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean by *that*. What makes you think that I am an unconventional person, pray?"

"I thought I was paying you a compliment," returned her son, calmly.

Mrs. Palliser did not very well know what to say to this; but the old lady, who seldom spoke, owing partly to her deafness, now put in a remark which turned the thoughts of all of them into another channel.

"I saw the new doctor to-day," she said, addressing the company at large. "A fine-looking man, my dear; straight and well set-up. Perhaps he'll be able to do something for Dr. Mirabel, you know."

"Really, mother?" said Mr. Palliser. "Dr. Lancaster, you mean, Yes, I've heard him very highly spoken of; and I think it's about time we had a change."

"It's a pity he's not married, though," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "I don't care much for an unmarried doctor. Has he attended Dr. Mirabel yet, Gerard?"

"I really don't know," said Gerard. "I suppose they'll call him in, if he's good for anything. But of course it won't be any use."

"You shouldn't cultivate a habit of always looking on the dark side of things, Gerard," said his mother. "If Dr. Lancaster is as

clever as your father says he is, how can we tell what he mayn't be able to do? At any rate, let us hope for the best."

"And be prepared for the worst," put in the old lady in her cheerful way.

"From what I hear," said Mr. Palliser, "I should think it likely that this Dr. Lancaster will be more of an acquisition to the neighborhood than I was at first inclined to think, apart from his professional abilities. They say he's a man who has travelled a good deal, and that he's remarkably well informed. I'm rather curious to meet him."

"I wonder whether he plays a good rubber," murmured Gerard.

"Just the sort of man who would," remarked Mr. Palliser.

"But he'll have to get married, you know," said his wife, uncompromisingly. "No family doctor ought to be a bachelor, and a married man in good practice would scarcely have much time for whist."

"Well, you had better set about finding a wife for him, my dear," said Mr. Palliser. "It will be something for you to do. There's Rosie, for instance. How should you like to be a doctor's wife, Rosie?"

"Not at all, thank you," said Rosie, with a slight show of animation. "It must be dreadful never to know whether your husband is coming home to dinner or not. And then, all the diseases, you know—it would be altogether too horrid, wouldn't it, Mrs. Palliser?"

"Oh, very disagreeable indeed, my dear," replied that lady promptly. "No, I don't think you must marry a doctor. We must think of somebody else."

"For Rosie?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"My dear Marmaduke!" exclaimed his wife, reprovingly. "For Dr. Lancaster, of course. Let me see, now. There's Helen Dartley—she's a nice, sensible girl; just the sort of girl to make a good doctor's wife. I fancy she's got a little money of her own, too. Or there's Jenny Adams; not very pretty, perhaps, but quite as good-looking as Helen, and she's clever, too. Or if he wants beauty, well, he won't find a prettier girl in Hampshire than—"

"Now you're going to be personal, my dear," interposed Mr. Palliser, politely. "How did you manage to meet Dr. Lancaster, mother?"

"No management at all," said the old lady. "It was purely

accidental. I was sitting with one of my old cottagers, who is very bad with the rheumatism, when this gentleman came in. He bowed to me, my dear, with the most courtly grace, and I had the pleasure of curtsying to him in return. 'Madam,' he said, 'I trust I have not called inopportunately.' 'Sir,' I replied, 'no visit could be better timed.' A very handsome, well-bred man, I assure you, my dears, and he was as polite to the poor woman as he was to me."

"I'm glad he seems such a nice man," said Mrs. Palliser. "Which old woman were you visiting this afternoon?"

"The one they call Old Nanny," replied the old lady; "Nanny Goodman is her real name. She lives in that small thatched cottage on the way to Polecat Bottom."

"Oh, I know," said Mrs. Palliser. "I believe she's a very decent body."

"Nanny Goodman?" said Rosie. "Mamma used to visit her at one time, but she found her so ungrateful and obstinate that there was no doing anything with her. Mamma was always telling her how wicked it was to be complaining so constantly about everything, and gave her no end of medicine and little books and such things; but she never read the books, I'm sure, and positively refused to take the medicine. And she would persist in taking snuff, though mamma was never tired of telling her what a dirty, wasteful habit it was. Mamma did suspect her of drinking, but that was not quite proved. I dare say she is sober enough. But mamma found it impossible to do her any good, and at last she gave it up. She told her that she was as obstinate as a mule, and has not been near her since."

"She's as sober a woman as I ever knew, my dear," said the old lady, rather sharply.

"But she's dreadfully obstinate and ungrateful," retorted Rosie.

"An embodiment of muliebrity, in fact," said Gerard.

"I wish to goodness some one would teach you the art of blushing, Gerard!" exclaimed Mr. Palliser.

"Well, I declare I'm quite anxious to see this new doctor," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "Old Mr. Parkes was never any use; he wasn't a very nice old man, either. Don't you remember, Marmaduke, what a shocking mess he made of it with Gerard? The dear boy would never have recovered if the case had been left to him. It'll be a great mercy if Dr. Lancaster turns out a really clever practitioner. I suppose he will call here soon,"

"I heard mamma speaking about Dr. Lancaster only yesterday," said Rosie. "She was wondering where he had come from, and who his people were, you know, and all that. But he's dreadfully reserved, it seems, and never talks about himself; indeed, I believe that Mrs. Fullerton did try once to draw him out, but he always evaded giving her a direct answer, and mamma said she thought it looked a little suspicious."

"Perhaps he is too modest to talk much about himself, Rosie dear," suggested Mrs. Palliser.

"I don't think mamma put it down to that," answered Rosie; "she fancied that it looked as though he had something to hide. You see, mamma always likes to know who everybody is; she says it gives one more confidence, especially in the case of one's medical man."

Rosie had a very artless, innocent way of speaking, and she looked very simple and very pretty as she said this. Mr. Palliser hemmed somewhat dubiously, and Gerard's lips took a downward curve, though he made no remark. Truth to tell, however, Rosie's mamma was not the only person in the neighborhood who was conscious of feeling some curiosity respecting the doctor. His predecessor had died suddenly of an apoplexy, and for several weeks the practice had remained without any incumbent, the doctors in the nearest villages looking after such cases as there were; then this Dr. Lancaster, of whom nothing or next to nothing was known, except that he had been house-surgeon to a hospital in the north of England, appeared upon the scene, bought the house and surgery from the late practitioner's executors, and quietly took up the practice. He was a tall, dark, handsome man, of grave manners; scarcely a man to be either catechised or patronized, save by the very bold; and while his general appearance was prepossessing, his reticence influenced public curiosity, so that nothing was more natural than that the gossips of the place should fabricate a mystery about him. He did not volunteer any statements respecting his parentage, his circumstances, or his antecedents; in consequence of which he formed the topic of much interesting speculation, one or two old ladies even going so far as to say that it would be safer, under the circumstances, to discourage his visits. Those who were not so fastidious, however, spoke loudly in his praise; while the very poor, who could not afford to pay him fees, joined in the chorus lustily.

The conversation languished somewhat after dear Rosie's last re-

mark, proceeding fitfully on topics of no particular interest to anybody. Gerard relapsed into his habitual taciturnity, rather to Mrs. Palliser's annoyance; Rosie chitter-chattered away in an aimless fashion, but failed to arouse much enthusiasm in her listeners; Mr. Palliser's thoughts reverted to the five hundred pounds he had so quixotically risked, and the old lady began to nod. At last Mrs. Palliser made a move, much to the general relief. But she could not help wishing, as she did so, that dear Gerard would be a little more demonstrative in his manner to dear Rosie. Of course it was impossible that she should fail to interest and attract him; and the good lady was extremely fearful lest Gerard's cool bearing towards her pet and *protégée* should work harm for him in dear Rosie's eyes.

CHAPTER IV

A TRULY CHRISTIAN ACT

Now Mrs. Palliser, though not without her prejudices, was a conscientious woman as well as a very kind one; and a few days' reflection upon her son's remarks about the Mirabels led her to the conviction that a friendly call would not, perhaps, be too great a stretch of Christian charity considering the circumstances. And the resolution did her credit. Every instinct of her nature was repelled by what she had heard of Madame Mirabel and her opinions; every nerve in her body was chafed by the hardness and the coldness, the uncompromising speech, the offensive imperturbability, which characterized the young doctor's wife. Indeed, no two women could have been more mutually antipathetic; for Madame Mirabel herself made no secret of the dislike she felt for the elder lady, whom she regarded as a very flighty, shallow, narrow-minded person, with whom it was impossible to have a single thought in common; and the probability is that Mrs. Palliser was instinctively conscious of the fact. It will be acknowledged, therefore, that when the good lady put on the pretty new bonnet which set off her gray curls so becomingly, and a pair of elegant pale kid gloves, preparatory to her intended visit, she really was performing an act of social and religious heroism.

Even the drawing-room into which she was shown gave her an uneasy feeling. It was so different, somehow, from most drawing-rooms. The furniture was comfortable enough; but there was no pretty feminine litter about—no dainty work-baskets, no flowers, none of those thousand-and-one indescribable and probably nameless knick-knacks which make a room so homelike and so gracefully untidy. The one symptom of human tastes and interests that it contained was a large round table, pushed away in a corner, and covered with miscellaneous literature. A good deal of this was French. There were the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the *Nouvelle Revue*, and several scientific magazines in the same language; a copy

of *Anna Karénina*, another of the *Kreutzer Sonata*, a few French novels of the *Décadence*, one or two numbers of *Nature*, a volume of Ibsen's Plays, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in English, a life of Schopenhauer, and three works by M. Richepin. Mrs. Palliser, having nothing better to do, turned them over, with an expression half - curious, half - perplexed, in her eyes. She had indeed penetrated into an enemy's country. First, with an inquiring and indulgent smile, she took up a book of Bourget's, and read a page or two. This she suddenly put down, with a faint color in her face, and turned over the leaves of one of the scientific periodicals. The unfamiliar terminology conveyed no impression to her mind, but it was at least inoffensive; then she laid her hand upon the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which she opened at an article entitled "La Démoralisation de l'Allemagne," which did not interest her very much. She was just laying it aside, with a view to taking up the next book upon the table — *Les Fleurs de la Philosophie* — when the door opened and Madame Mirabel appeared.

"How do you do, Madame Mirabel?" said Mrs. Palliser, advancing, after a moment's hesitation. The poor lady had imagined that her hostess would have greeted her first; but Madame Mirabel's face wore only an expression of slight surprise, and on entering the room she had contented herself with a rather cold inclination of the head.

"It is very good of you to call upon me," she replied, taking the other's offered hand with a formal air. "Won't you sit down?"

Poor Mrs. Palliser did as she was invited, feeling, however, somewhat chilled. "I was so sorry to hear such a sad account of Dr. Mirabel, the other day," she said, plunging *in medias res* in her unaccustomed nervousness. "I trust he does not suffer much?"

"My husband is very ill," said Madame Mirabel. "He suffers, certainly; and I am afraid there is much suffering still in store for him. But he has his consolations."

"Ah, we need consolations when it comes to that, don't we?" murmured Mrs. Palliser, sympathetically. "I feel for you so much—so very much. My own dear husband has never had a day's illness; we have everything to be thankful for in that respect. Does Dr. Mirabel keep up his spirits pretty well?"

"His spirits are excellent, thank you," answered Madame Mirabel, briefly.

"Really?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser.

"You seem surprised," remarked the other, with the ghost of a

smile. "I suppose that according to all precedent a man in his position ought to be rather solemn than otherwise. But he isn't—not one bit. I'm afraid it's rather bad form."

The tone in which this was said struck Mrs. Palliser as unnecessarily aggressive. She drew herself up a little, and folded her hands upon her lap; then, having collected her thoughts, said:

"Surely, dear Madame Mirabel, it is scarcely a question of 'form.' Anybody who is as ill as I fear poor Dr. Mirabel seems to be in a solemn position, and has cause to feel solemnly about it. But a man may be solemn and yet not unhappy. We, you know, who have a blessed hope of everlasting life, have no cause to sorrow as those who have no hope. And I hear that your poor husband does look forward to a future life," added the good lady, though she blushed with a sense of her own hypocrisy as she said it.

"Let me get you some tea," said Madame Mirabel, rising to ring the bell. "Yes, you are quite right; my husband believes in the continuity of experience, and I have no doubt whatever that it contributes in no small degree to his cheerfulness."

This way of putting it sounded a great deal too scientific to be satisfactory, and Mrs. Palliser leaned back in her chair feeling less convinced than ever. Belief in a future life based on science was simply valueless to her, because science was, in the good lady's view, the natural antagonist of revealed religion; and the notion of a revealed truth being independently proved or taught by science was to her as subversive of the natural order of things as the introduction of universal suffrage by the Tories would seem to an advanced Liberal. But it was difficult for her to put her disagreement into words without appearing controversial, and so she wisely refrained her lips.

"Of course he wants for nothing," she said, tentatively. "I should be so thankful if we could do anything for him; I hope, Madame Mirabel, you will always make any use of me, you know—"

"Oh, thank you very much," replied the other, quickly. "He has everything he requires. He is an excellent patient, and our medical man is as attentive as possible. He could not be in better hands than he is."

"That is well," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "May I ask who is attending him?"

"Dr. Lancaster," said Madame Mirabel, with the very slightest heightening of color.

"Oh, really," said the elder lady. "We have heard excellent accounts of Dr. Lancaster, but not yet had the pleasure of meeting him. Have you known him long?"

"About three weeks," replied Madame Mirabel. "He is very good to my husband; he sits and talks with him. In fact, he is up-stairs now."

"Is he, indeed?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser with interest.

"Yes," said Madame Mirabel, indifferently. "I dare say he will be down directly. He generally comes in for a cup of tea before going away."

Just then the door opened, and a servant entered with the tea. Madame Mirabel rose from her seat, and busied herself with the tea-caddy, while the visitor sat hoping that the new doctor would speedily make his appearance. It was difficult work to get on unaided with so very antipathetic a person as her hostess, and a third party would be a very welcome relief; besides which, she was naturally curious to see what sort of a man the doctor really was.

She had not long to wait. Before she had got through her first cup a man's steps were heard descending the stairs, and the next moment Dr. Lancaster entered the room. As old Mrs. Palliser had said, he was a man of striking appearance—tall, dark, handsome, and short-bearded, with deep-set eyes and a firmly-moulded, high-bridged nose, which gave his face a look of unusual decision and strength. Mrs. Palliser found herself involuntarily regarding him with considerable interest, not unmixed with admiration; impressions which were enhanced by the grave and gentle courtesy of the doctor's manner, the faultless ease which characterized his gestures, and the precise simplicity of his dress.

Madame Mirabel turned almost brusquely towards him as he appeared, with a marked increase of alacrity. For a moment she looked pleased and eager; then she performed the ceremony of introduction in her usual indifferent style, and relapsed into taciturnity, leaving her two guests to improve the occasion of making each other's acquaintance at their leisure. At first, as was only natural, the conversation was confined to civilities. Dr. Lancaster said very little; Mrs. Palliser, inclined to be more expansive, being thus forced to take the lead. She talked of the neighborhood and its bracing climate; hoped he would soon have time to explore the surrounding country; trusted that he was comfortably installed in his house, and had good servants; and

finally began to enumerate the most visitable people of her acquaintance. The doctor received her advances with the utmost modesty and gratitude, and carried her another cup of tea.

"And then there are the Grants, you know," said the excellent lady, warming to her subject. "Mr. Grant is our rector; not very high—but still, a little inclined that way, you know. The Chatterings I dare say you've met already. Oh no—I shouldn't say that Mr. Grant was at all extreme; but of course such things are always judged so differently by different people. It all depends upon what one is accustomed to. You have not met Mr. Grant yet, I think you said, Dr. Lancaster?"

"Not yet," replied the doctor, who had not said anything at all about it.

"I am sure you would like him," she continued. "He is a very clever man, I believe—very well read, you know, and all that. They say his acquaintance with the Early Fathers is something perfectly extraordinary!"

"I always esteem it a privilege to meet people who can tell me things of which I am entirely ignorant myself," said the doctor, smiling courteously. "Is there a Mrs. Grant?"

"Oh dear, yes!" answered Mrs. Palliser, to whom the idea of an unmarried clergyman was almost as distasteful as that of an unmarried doctor. "Oh yes; certainly there's a Mrs. Grant. And a very excellent woman she is, too; just the right woman for a clergyman's wife. She's quite her husband's right hand in parish work. You'll no doubt come across her constantly in your visits among the poor. There's Mrs. Chattering, too; most indefatigable, I believe she is, and so generous in the way of medicines, you know, to those who require keeping up but can't afford to pay. You're sure to meet *her* soon, if you haven't done so already," added Mrs. Palliser, with a little laugh.

Dr. Lancaster raised his eyebrows with a slightly whimsical expression. "I have been here scarcely a month," he said, "and I have already thrown no fewer than fourteen medicine-bottles out of the windows of different cottages, and taken good care that they should break, too. I never asked who the charitable donor was, but I know that the contents of the bottles were exceedingly pernicious to my patients."

"Well, Dr. Lancaster, you *have* done for yourself, then!" cried Mrs. Palliser, laughing gayly. "Poor Mrs. Chattering; no wonder she—" Here the good lady stopped short on the brink of an indis-

cretion. "Well, no doubt you were quite right; oh, perfectly right, of course. Mrs. Chattering is a woman of the very best intentions, but she is a little peculiar perhaps—she has her little weaknesses, you know, like the rest of us. I do think, however, that you will like the Grants."

"I have no doubt I shall," replied the doctor, courteously. "It is in the power of a rector's wife to be a most efficient help to a medical man—supposing that she does not lay claim to any prerogative in connection with the pharmacopœia," he added, with a grave smile. "Every parish clergyman ought to have a wife, supposing his choice a wise one."

"I thoroughly agree with you," replied Mrs. Palliser, cordially. "And I hope you do not limit your approval of marriage to the case of clergymen," she ventured to add, with a beaming smile.

"By no means," said the doctor, seriously. "No man should go through life—unmarried."

Both ladies darted a look at him. "Then why don't you marry yourself?" was the question which arose in Mrs. Palliser's mind; though of course she did not give utterance to it. Madame Mirabel's glance was one of swift inquiry, as though she sought to read the thought that was passing in his mind; and a momentary pause ensued. Then Madame Mirabel suddenly rose.

"Excuse me one moment," she said, hastily; "I am just going to see my husband."

She had passed out before Dr. Lancaster had time to open the door for her, and the two were left alone. Then Mrs. Palliser said,

"I am sorry to hear that Dr. Mirabel is in such a sad state."

"Yes," replied the other. "He is very ill. But he may still last some time, with proper care."

"I feel very glad to think that he is in such good hands," said Mrs. Palliser.

"His is scarcely a case in which the best of doctors can be of much service," was the reply. "He has a better doctor than I am—his indomitable cheerfulness. It is strange, the influence that mind has over matter. I have known some men who have almost seemed to keep themselves alive for months by the mere force of their own powerful wills. A sick man who makes up his mind he is going to die lessens his chances of life very materially. This is often noticed among Eastern nations—Turks and Hindoos, for instance. The curious thing about our friend up-stairs is that he

does not cling to life—he scarcely seems anxious to recover; and yet this very indifference, coupled with his remarkable curiosity as to the experiences which lie before him after the inevitable change has come, induces a cheerfulness and equanimity eminently favorable to him from a pathological point of view. It is in many ways a very unusual case, and one that interests me very deeply.”

“How wonderful!” exclaimed Mrs. Palliser.

“He is altogether a most interesting man,” continued Dr. Lancaster. “He has a cultivated mind, and a sweetness of disposition that is very winning. By-the-way, he was speaking to me just now of a young gentleman who I fancy must be your son—a Mr. Gerard Palliser. He seems to have taken a great liking to him.”

“Oh yes, to be sure,” said Mrs. Palliser, smiling. “Gerard told me he had been to see him lately.”

“And I hope he will continue his visits, so long as he does not excite or fatigue the patient,” replied Dr. Lancaster.

“Of course,” assented Mrs. Palliser. “I am delighted to think Gerard can be of any use to him, poor young man. Well, I am glad he is so well off for kind, sympathetic friends. It is most fortunate for him, I am sure, that you should have settled in the neighborhood.”

It was curious that neither of them seemed to include the sick man's wife in the number of his sympathizers; and yet no one could say that she was remiss in her duties to him. She was as careful and conscientious in their discharge as though she had been a qualified hospital-nurse; and if her manners to the world were somewhat cold—what then? All women do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves. And there could be no doubt that her husband, at any rate, was very fond of her.

She came back shortly afterwards, and Mrs. Palliser rose to take her leave. Chilled by her hostess's reserve, she was delighted to have met Dr. Lancaster, who, with an apology for not having called earlier, begged permission to repair his error in a day or two; and she had suddenly conceived a great interest in Dr. Mirabel. This was often the way with the excellent lady. Any strong appeal to her sympathy made a breach in her prejudices at once, bringing out all that was warm and genial in her nature, and converting her there and then into an enthusiastic partisan; and in the present case her new-born kindness for the sick man was

much increased by her sorrow that he should be tied to such a very objectionable wife.

It was a bright, sunshiny afternoon, and the moorland looked very beautiful in its covering of gold and purple. Mrs. Palliser, enjoying the fresh breeze, and full of her own thoughts, stepped almost jauntily along, smiling graciously upon the little rustics as they pulled their forelocks to her, and running over in her mind the account of her experiences with which she intended to regale her husband that evening at dinner. At last she arrived at the turning which led to her house—a lane running at right angles to the road she had been traversing; and there, at the corner, she met a lady coming from the opposite direction. The lady was thin, and faded, and rather short, with light eyes and hair that had once been flaxen; she was richly and expensively dressed, and wore a handsome ostrich feather in her bonnet, and altogether looked like a lady in very comfortable circumstances indeed. We have heard of her already, and we have met her daughter.

“Ah, Mrs. Palliser!” she exclaimed, holding out her delicately gloved hand with an *empressé* air.

“Ah, Mrs. Chattering!” said the other lady, in the same breath.

“And so you’re taking a walk,” remarked the new-comer, in a thin, sharp voice. “It’s a delicious day, isn’t it? One almost gets tired of the sunshine, I declare. I’ve just been my rounds, and I’m positively tired to death. Ah, my dear Mrs. Palliser, I think you’re perfectly right never to go near cottagers. Of all ungrateful, stupid, obstinate people—and then, you know, they *will* keep their windows shut; just think of that, now, on a day like this, so you may imagine what the air’s like inside—and it’s no use *my* saying anything, for they don’t listen if I do; I positively think they prefer bad smells to fresh air. I know what I should do if I had *my* way with them; and oh, what do you think? No fewer than three of my medicine-bottles thrown away, out of the windows, Mrs. Palliser—such wicked waste, and such impertinence, you know; the people actually have no shame, my dear, and when they have they tell such shocking falsehoods—really I quite despair of them sometimes, and when I tell Mr. Chattering about it he only laughs and says I had better appeal to the new doctor, a man we none of us know anything about, which oughtn’t to be the case with one’s medical man. Not that he isn’t a gentlemanly-looking person, and I dare say knows his business, but when it’s a question of somebody who’s got to come into your very house and

bedrooms, my dear, I do think we ought to know everything there is to be known about him before we call him in."

Here Mrs. Chattering paused for breath; and Mrs. Palliser remarked:

"But I have just been having a most agreeable conversation with Dr. Lancaster, Mrs. Chattering. I think myself he's a delightful man, and—"

"Have you really?" interrupted Mrs. Chattering, eagerly. "What a pity I didn't happen to meet you first; you might have told him about those wicked people throwing away my medicine-bottles. As a doctor he would naturally sympathize with me, and no doubt a word from him would go a long way, for cottagers think such a deal of doctors, you know, and—oh, by-the-bye, where did you see him? Nobody ill at home, I hope? We haven't had an illness in our house for years, my dear, and I can't help thinking it's a sort of acknowledgment from Providence of my labors among the poor, because, you see, we're told that the poor we shall have always with us, and—no, that isn't it—oh, it's about giving to the poor being the same as lending to the Lord, you know—not that I approve of always bringing Scripture in as Methodists do, but it seems a case in point—and *where* did you say you met Dr. Lancaster just now?"

"It was at Madame Mirabel's," replied Mrs. Palliser. "Her poor husband is very ill, you know, and he seems such a dear, sweet man from what I hear—"

"Madame Mirabel's!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, opening her eyes. "My dear Mrs. Palliser, I hadn't a notion you knew the Mirabels. Surely they're not—a—the proper sort of people to know much of. They *never* go to church, or give anything that I ever heard of to the missionaries, and what they have to live upon I'm sure I don't know, though I suppose they must have something, for I haven't actually heard of their running into debt for their butcher's-meat; but still, you see, they are so different from all the rest of us, and I've been so terrified lest dear Rosie should meet the woman anywhere—of course her husband, as you say, is confined to his room—for I'm sure she can't be a nice woman, all full of those horrid socialistic, infidel notions that one picks up abroad, I expect—"

"Well, I can't say I admire Madame Mirabel particularly myself, dear Mrs. Chattering," interrupted Mrs. Palliser, "and certainly I don't think she would be a very suitable companion for dear Rosie.

But I believe her husband is really a very charming man, and as she is almost always with him there is not much chance of Rosie coming across her."

"Why, you didn't *see* Dr. Mirabel, did you?" inquired Mrs. Chattering. "How do you know he's so charming?"

"I only spoke according to Dr. Lancaster's account," said Mrs. Palliser, deprecatingly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, as much as to say that she didn't think much of *that* authority. "Well, that is only one man we know nothing about vouching for another man we know nothing about; for I don't suppose there are a dozen people in the place who ever spoke to Dr. Mirabel at all. Besides, my dear, there's no knowing—very likely they used to know each other abroad; *we* know what life abroad is in some of those countries—India, you know, and all that—and there's no doubt that Madame Mirabel's a handsome woman according to some tastes, and it's only natural that a man like Dr. Lancaster should admire her. Oh *no*," in deprecation of Mrs. Palliser's look of indignant protest, "of *course* I'm not hinting at any love affair, because we none of us know anything about it; I only say that if all these people *did* know each other abroad, why, you see, they might have met before the Mirabels were married, and there's no knowing, you see, because we really know so very little about any of them that it's just as well to be on our guard, especially those of us who have children, for there's nothing so bad as insidious example—"

"Really, my dear Mrs. Chattering," interposed Mrs. Palliser, "I think you are scarcely justified in expressing such very injurious suspicions. Indeed, I am sure you are mistaken. I must be going on now; but do let me advise you to make Dr. Lancaster's acquaintance yourself as soon as possible, and whatever you do don't forget to speak to him about those medicine-bottles."

Good Mrs. Palliser was totally unable to resist that last little bit of mischief. Mrs. Chattering, not unaccustomed to be pulled up in mid-career, took her dismissal good-humoredly enough, and the two ladies parted on smiling terms. Little did either of them suspect the strange events which were destined to follow the very ordinary occurrences of that afternoon, and the part that two at least of our acquaintances were to take in them.

CHAPTER V

"THE INFLUENCE OF THE MAN HIMSELF"

DR. LANCASTER lost no time in paying his promised visit to the Pallisers, where he made a very favorable impression upon the whole family. The two ladies were charmed with the deferential courtesy of his manners. Mr. Palliser, intellectually a very lazy man, and taking but small interest in literary and scientific subjects, appreciated the breadth and ease of his conversation upon the topics of the day; even the critical Gerard was attracted by him, though not at first. It was only when Dr. Lancaster, in the course of discussing some phase of village life, dropped a rather abstract remark about the influence of ideals on social and individual progress, that the youth recognized in him a kindred intellect.

The interest that Gerard took in the Mirabels was now shared by his parents. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that it was of the same kind in both cases. With the elder people the feeling took the form of natural human sympathy, tempered by many a head-shake at the heterodoxy of the sufferer himself, and still more strongly by the unconquerable dislike of Mrs. Palliser for his wife. "It is impossible for me to like such a cold, unwomanly person, Marmaduke," she would say, regretfully. Gerard would remark that Madame Mirabel was cold because she had been treated coldly, and the two would thereupon launch out into a labored wrangle about the interaction of causes and effects, in which the poor lady would flounder hopelessly for about five minutes, and then have to give it up. Gerard's interest was of a more analytical order. The character of Madame Mirabel excited his attention and curiosity; it was complex, unusual; it afforded an attractive subject for study and investigation. Added to this was a sincere admiration for what he had called the lady's heroism—the stoical intrepidity of her bearing under circumstances so painful and so distressing; and if any one had been foolish enough to hint that such admiration was at all heightened or buttressed up by a consciousness of the lady's beauty, he would have met with the most untempered scorn.

With regard to Dr. Mirabel, Gerard's feelings were somewhat simpler. He had contracted a cordial friendship with the dying man, and did what he could to keep him cheerful. He liked him and he pitied him. He was also very curious to hear that theory of his about the continuity of existence—a hypothesis utterly unsupported, as far as he knew, by any scientific sanction whatever; but the prospect of argument attracted him, and he began to look forward quite eagerly to hearing all that Dr. Mirabel had to say upon the subject.

The opportunity soon came. He was a tolerably regular visitor now, and was on fairly familiar terms with both of them. A week or so after Dr. Lancaster's call he strolled round about five o'clock, in expectation of a cup of tea. Madame Mirabel was in the drawing-room with her hat on.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said, in her straightforward fashion, as he entered. She had been wearing a strangely preoccupied look when his knock was heard, and this now gave place to a bright, frank smile of pleasure. Gerard wondered that he never properly remarked before how handsome she really was.

"Then please give me some tea," he returned, sinking into a chair. "You're looking wonderfully well to-day, Madame Mirabel."

"Yes, I manage to keep up," she replied, indifferently.

"How is the doctor?" asked Gerard.

"Wonderfully well 'too, considering," said his wife. "He is better and stronger to-day than he has been for weeks."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Gerard. "Has Lancaster been yet?"

"Dr. Lancaster has just left," said Madame Mirabel. "And now you have come. You are both very good to us."

She raised her eyes and looked full at him as she said this. There was something almost electrical in the straight flash of her blue eyes, and Gerard felt a momentary shock from the force of it.

"You know there's nothing I wouldn't do for you," he said, curtly.

"It was your kindness to my husband I was thinking of," she replied, with all her usual reserve; "and I am now going to take advantage of it to go out and get a little fresh air. I've been in-doors for two days, and feel nearly stifled."

"I'll gladly sit with Dr. Mirabel while you are away," said Gerard, putting his cup down.

"Thank you," said Madame Mirabel, rising. "You're sure you won't think me rude? I positively pine for a breeze."

"You couldn't be rude if you tried to," exclaimed Gerard, almost impulsively.

A somewhat sardonic curl played upon her lips as she wondered whether Gerard's mother would be ready to indorse that opinion. "I should indeed be inhuman were I to treat you with anything but the sincerest gratitude," she replied, with one of her sudden smiles, as she held out her ungloved hand. There was something strangely attractive about the woman when the hidden fire broke every now and then through the mask of her habitual coldness. Then she went swiftly out, leaving Gerard to go up-stairs alone to her husband's room.

Dr. Mirabel was sitting at the open window with his back to the door, puffing a medicated cigarette. He put his hand up over the back of the chair to greet Gerard without altering his position, while Gerard, with his unfailing consideration, sat down beside him silently. There was no necessity for any salutations between the two, and it was uniformly Gerard's object to save his friend as much exertion as he could.

"I knew you would come," said Mirabel, at last. "I have been reading that little book of yours—you remember? It is good—it is very good. He was a wise man, your Monsieur Arnold. Perhaps I shall meet him some day, and then I will tell him about you."

"I should hope you'd find some rather more interesting subject than that," said Gerard, smiling.

"I don't think so," said the other, brightly. "I should never have known him but for you. Has my wife gone out?"

"Yes," said Gerard.

"Ah, poor Julie!" breathed Mirabel, with a sigh. "It is very hard for her. She thinks that when I die we shall never meet again. She is wrong—quite wrong. But I cannot convince her, and so—what will you? It is a great pity—a very great pity for us both."

"I wish you'd give *me* a chance of being convinced," said Gerard, seizing his opportunity. "Tell me what this theory of yours is. The idea interests me deeply, and I am quite open to conviction."

"Yes, I think you are," exclaimed Dr. Mirabel, with animation. "Well, I will tell you if you like, and then you can form your judgment. But first please give me another cigarette."

Gerard reached him the box, struck a vesta for him, and shook up his cushions. Mirabel threw himself back in his chair with a sigh expressive of content. He paused thoughtfully for a minute or so, and then said, slowly:

"You want to know on what I base my belief in a continuation of life after the death of the body. In one word: I base it on the fact that we have two bodies, and not one only."

"Two bodies?" exclaimed Gerard, surprised.

"First of all," continued Mirabel, "we are confronted with a fact we cannot deny, but which has to be accounted for. I mean Consciousness. Life is wonderful enough, life is a great mystery, but Consciousness occupies a higher plane even than life. Many things have life that are not conscious of their own existence.

"Now, we need not perplex ourselves by attempting to analyze Consciousness, as do the psychologists of the day. They talk about their percepts and their concepts and their receipts until the brain turns round. But there is one phase of Consciousness that is important. I mean physical sensation. You want something more than organism to account for that. Suppose I stick a pin into your leg, you feel the prick, and you cry 'Aouh!' Now, what part of you is it that feels?"

"The brain, I believe," said Gerard, hesitatingly.

"But you don't feel the prick in your head!" retorted the doctor. "You feel it in your leg. Yet flesh and skin cannot feel all by themselves. They are nothing but so much matter. Where do they get the power to feel from? The brain?—the nerves? But your brain and your nerves is nothing but matter, too.* They are nothing but the machinery. No, you want something more than all that, *mon ami*, and that is just what the *matérialistes* do not understand."

"Yes, I think I see that," assented Gerard.

"Now then," resumed Dr. Mirabel, raising himself a little, with excitement in his eyes. "Now we come to the point. You have had a great scientific man in England here who offers us the true explanation of it all, though he does not see how far his explanation goes and what it leads to. I mean the professor Clifford. What does the professor Clifford say? Why, he says that to every molecule of the organic matter composing your body there is

* No instance can be mentioned in which sensation and intelligence appear to result from any combination of the particles of matter.—*Dugald Stewart*.

attached an atom of something he can't find a proper name for, and so he call it *mind-stuff*. Just think what that means. The mind-stuff is coextensive with the material of our body, atom for atom, point for point; as inextricably mixed up with it as sugar that is dissolved in water—we are very fond of *eau sucrée*, you know, we Frenchmen—or as oxygen and hydrogen are in the water they form together. Now do you see why your leg feels the pain when it is pricked? Thus we have two bodies, and as they are mathematically coextensive with each other, coinciding each to each, as you say in the geometry, it follows that the one you can't see must be the exact facsimile of the one you can. It is the mind-body which thinks, by which we move and feel. And you cannot separate the two—unless you commit murder—any more than you can separate the sugar from the water without a chemical precipitation. It is only by death that the separation can take place, and then the mind-body is set free.”

“But how can you tell that it survives the death of the material body?” asked Gerard.

“What is there to kill it?” replied the doctor. “Do you think your knives or your bullets or your poisons can touch the so subtle material of the mind? * It is intangible! You might as well try and grasp the faint specks and threads of gossamer you see moving in front of your eyes. Besides, its survival has been proved a thousand thousand times. People believe not all the stories that are told of apparitions after death or at the moment of death. They are right, because they do not understand how such things can be. Well, here is the explanation. I tell you, such cases are too numerous, too well-authenticated by many competent and trustworthy witnesses, to be pooh-poohed. What they call a ghost is simply the mind-body of a person whose material body is dead. It is the *real man*, set free from the gross substance which encumbered him. I do not believe a great deal I find in the Bible, but I find in my theory an explanation of some of it. Take what is related of Jesus Christ after he was dead. He reappeared, he was recognized, he passed bodily through a wooden door that was fast shut. Well, that was the mind-body of him, a facsimile of the

* When we reflect on the difference between the operations of mind and the qualities of matter, it appears much more wonderful that the *two substances* should be so intimately united as we find them actually to be, than to suppose that the former may exist in a conscious and intelligent state when separated from the latter.—*Dugald Stewart*.

dead material body, independent of space and material obstacles. Or take Saint Paul. He knew all about it; he agree with me. 'There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body,' says Saint Paul. Here I give you the scientific theory which proves he is right. And, ah, he is like me. He want to be free from it. He long for the separation. • 'O the miserable I am!' he says, 'who will deliver me from this dead body of mine'?"

"It sounds as though it ought to be true," said Gerard, reflectively.

"It is true," replied Mirabel. "It explains an enormous number of things that can be explained no other way. Think what it means, now, in some of its details. Every corpuscle of blood, every spherule of bodily humor, has its counterpart of mind-stuff. What mystery, now, is there in the heredity, in the reappearance in your character and mine of the idiosyncrasies of our parents or even our most remotest ancestors? Where is the difficulty people see in the influence of mind upon matter and matter upon mind? The professor Tyndall says that the passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is unthinkable. Is it so now? We feel with our minds, they say. True; for we cannot touch the tiniest spot of our bodies that is free from mind-stuff. And the mind-stuff dominates everything. It cheats the body, and uses it like the lump of clay it is. You have heard of hypnotism? Well, you know, the great hypnotists can apply a Spanish blister to a patient who is under their influence, and if they tell him it is vaseline or cold-cream, not only will he believe it, but the effect of the blister upon the skin will be that of cold-cream and not of a blister. Or they may put cold-cream on him and tell him it is Spanish-fly, and immediately the skin will inflame and smart and develop a frightful sore. That is produced by the mind of one man acting upon the mind of another man, and *his* mind acting upon his body. Yes, the body is the drudge, the servant, the heavy weight; it suffers, it is abused, it has to work, and it gradually wears out; then the mind, the strong, pure, subtle mind-body, which is the real essence of the man, is released from its degrading companionship, and revels in its new-found liberty."

"I don't quite grasp it all yet," observed Gerard, after a pause. "The difference between mind and matter is so essential that it is difficult to see how one can act upon the other. One is tangible, the other belongs to a different category—you can't class them

together. The idea of mind acting on matter or matter acting on mind seems as absurd to me as to say you could catch a thought and shut it up in a cage like a canary."

"Quite so," replied the doctor; "that is simply because you haven't realized all that is implied in the expression 'mind-stuff.' You look upon it as a figure of speech. That is just what it is not. *Mind is matter*, only in a form so subtle as entirely to escape our senses under ordinary conditions. You would not deny the materiality of oxygen or carbonic acid, would you, simply because you cannot carve it with a knife? And yet either might very easily kill you, *mon ami*, one as well as the other."

"But if mind is in fact material, it might be destroyed, just as the body is," objected Gerard.

"That is the very reason it cannot be, *mon cher* Gerard," replied the doctor; "surely you forget that matter is indestructible?"

"But in its entirety, as a mind-body, it might be—just as the visible body is when its parts are disintegrated after death," said Gerard, annoyed at his mistake.

"That of course is possible," acknowledged Mirabel, "but only under conditions too remote from our experience for us to judge of. What is certain to me is that the mind-body survives its separation from the visible body, and further than that I do not care to go. I am quite willing to take my chance of what may become of me in the far future. Perhaps there are other changes in store—countless changes, even. Well, let them come. I shall welcome all, in view of the great experiences that they will bring."

Dr. Mirabel laid his head back upon the cushions, a little exhausted by his efforts. Gerard remained silent, thinking over what he had heard. Of course he was far from being convinced, but the doctor's theories were new to him, and he felt attracted to them in spite of his predispositions to the contrary. Anyhow, for Mirabel's sake, he determined that he would not pursue the subject further on that day.

"I'm awfully obliged to you for telling me all this," he said at last. "You've given me a great deal to think of. Now you'd better rest, and not talk any more."

The doctor smiled. "And you may give me some lemonade, if you please," he said. "I feel rather thirsty. It's on the table just outside the door."

Gerard brought him the liquid, and the invalid drank it eagerly. "Ah, that is good," he said. "When the vitality is low, the

simplest pleasures are the most enjoyed. What is the time just now?"

"A quarter-past six," said Gerard, glancing at the clock.

"Julie will be soon back now," remarked the doctor.

"I wonder whether it would hurt you to go out a little," suggested Gerard. "We're having a wonderful spell of fine weather; it might even do you good to have an occasional drive."

"Yes, it might—it is possible," said the other, doubtfully. "I will ask my good Lancaster the next time he come."

"You like him, don't you?" asked Gerard.

"*Mais oui*," replied Mirabel. "He is one of the best men I have known. He do me great good; I am better, now, for some days past. I feel more strong, more light. I think it is the influence of the man himself. He seems to understand me, somehow, and he make me confide myself in him altogether. You have seen him—hein?"

"He was calling at our place the other day," said Gerard. "Yes, I liked what I saw of him very much."

"I think I feel like dozing," said Mirabel, after a pause. "I will shut the eyes for a little. Ah, I love the open air. It must be good to die out-of-doors."

"I don't believe you're going to die at all," said Gerard, on the spur of the moment.

"*Quien sabe?*" murmured the other, lying comfortably back with closed eyes.

In a few minutes he was asleep. Gerard, struck by some subtle—perhaps imaginary—alteration in his appearance, sat and watched him silently. The man really was looking better. He seemed stronger, too; his cough had scarcely troubled him at all the whole afternoon, and there was less hectic brightness on his cheek. Yet it was scarcely possible, thought Gerard, that he should really recover. What disease gave rise to more fallacious hopes than consumption, or allowed its victim the enjoyment of better spirits or more delusive gleams of returning vigor? And it was known to be incurable, when past a certain stage.

Then a curious thought struck him, suggested by the sleeping man's own theory. Had this intangible, powerful, mysterious wraith he believed in—this unseen mind-body, this double of one's self—any potency to arrest or to hasten the dissolution of the material frame? Surely, in a union so close, so intimate, there must be mutual influences—nay, there were—and, that being so,

it was clear that the stronger must prevail in the long-run. To what end, then, was this influence being exerted in Dr. Mirabel's own case: was it working for life or for death?

Here another thought occurred to him. In the case of hypnotism referred to by Mirabel, there was the fact of one man's mind acting indirectly upon some one else's body—through the medium, that is, of the mind of the patient himself. Could this throw any light upon the matter? Of course he might be mistaken altogether. The apparent improvement might exist in his imagination only. He had not the eye of an expert, and his judgment was worth next to nothing. Still it seemed undeniable that, when he had seen him some weeks previously, the day he had met Madame Mirabel on Gibbet Hill, the patient was to all appearance dying rapidly. At that time he had been under Dr. Lancaster for no more than a few days, and it was no secret that the physician had had a bad opinion of his case. Now there was a decided improvement; an improvement so gradual as to have been almost imperceptible, but, at the stage where it had by then arrived, scarcely to be mistaken. Mirabel himself bore witness to it, and had used the remarkable words, "I think it is the influence of the man himself."

Looking out of the window at this point, Gerard's eye fell upon the figure of Madame Mirabel approaching from a distance. Mirabel still slept. The time for departure had come, and, noiselessly leaving the room, Gerard went down-stairs, let himself out at the front door, and started briskly off to meet the lady. Apparently lost in thought, she did not see him till he was close upon her. Then she glanced up in surprise.

"I saw you coming back, from the window," he said, as he came up. "The doctor's asleep."

"Asleep?" she echoed, quickly. "What made him go to sleep, I wonder?"

"He seemed a little tired, I think," replied Gerard, "and he dropped off quite comfortable about a quarter of an hour ago. Of course I didn't leave him till I saw you coming."

"How did he strike you?" inquired Madame Mirabel, with a side-glance.

"He seems to me considerably better," said Gerard. "It may be my fancy—but I thought his complexion looked healthier, and he scarcely coughed at all."

"I told you he was pretty well to-day," said Madame Mirabel,

slackening her pace. "I suppose you found him in as good spirits as usual?"

"I saw an improvement there, too," replied Gerard. "He was quite cheerful, without any of that feverish gayety I noticed in him formerly. He's sleeping beautifully now. He told me he thought it was Dr. Lancaster who had done him good. He says he has no end of confidence in him."

"Ah! I shouldn't wonder," said Madame Mirabel, briefly.

Gerard glanced at her as she walked beside him, and was struck by her preoccupied expression. She looked like a person trying to solve some perplexing enigma. At last she said:

"Do you know Dr. Lancaster? I forget."

"Only very slightly," he replied. "But I shall no doubt see more of him in future."

"Do," she said, with a certain incisiveness in her voice. "Cultivate his acquaintance. Talk to him."

"There is no reason why I should not," answered Gerard, mildly surprised. "He rather interests me."

"I should like to know his real opinion of my husband," said Madame Mirabel, as though with an effort. "Do you seriously think he's doing him any good?"

"It appears so," said Gerard. "I will certainly talk to him. No doubt you are anxious to know what his opinion is. But I should think he is far likelier to be open with you than with me."

"There's no knowing," replied Madame Mirabel. "Gaston is better—what has he done to him? I know he hasn't altered the treatment in any way. Of course I am anxious to learn all I can. He may say more to you—but one can't tell. You will do what I ask, won't you?"

She turned upon him another of those penetrating flashes of her blue eyes that had so strange a power. Gerard's heart seemed to give a great leap. "You know there is nothing that I would not do for you," he said, in a fervent undertone. "I am entirely at your disposal—now and always."

She gave him her hand in silence. And as he walked home that evening, he was conscious of a sensation within his breast which puzzled him very sorely—a sensation to which, up till that fateful hour, he had been a total stranger.

CHAPTER VI

A FLUTTER IN THE DOVE-COT

Just about this time it occurred to Mrs. Palliser that, the weather being so warm and seasonable, she might fitly invite a few friends to drink tea with her in her pretty garden ; and cards were accordingly issued to that effect. Privately, however, the good lady warned them that it was not to be a garden-party, properly so called. It was not Mrs. Palliser's way to give pretentious entertainments. What she enjoyed was getting a few friendly acquaintances round her for a confidential chat ; for the good lady's confidences were apt to be of a somewhat open and expansive nature, and the more people she intrusted with her innocent secrets and reflections the happier she felt. And just then she longed to relieve her mind of many things that were pressing on it in regard to the Mirabels. She did not dare, of course, to send Madame Mirabel a card ; the serious condition of the lady's husband alone rendered that unnecessary ; besides, it was clear that if Madame Mirabel herself were present she could scarcely be made the subject of general conversation. The Chatterings were of course included, Mrs. Palliser deeming it no more than her duty to give Gerard every possible opportunity of furthering his acquaintance with dear Rosie.

Mrs. Palliser was a passed-mistress in all matters pertaining to domestic elegances. Her rooms were always prettily arranged, being tastefully adorned with such hangings, fittings, curios and the like as contributed to the best effect without giving them the appearance of a broker's shop. Her husband, too, had a pretty taste in Sheraton and Chippendale furniture, in which he invested very effectively from time to time ; while Mrs. Palliser was particularly fastidious about her crockery-ware, and vowed she could not drink out of anything but the very thinnest and most delicate china. The same nicety of appointment, as might be expected, prevailed in the garden ; nowhere were there trimmer flower-beds, more velvety lawns, better-kept shrubberies, or more brilliant flowers than

Mrs. Palliser could boast. All things considered, then, she was in an unusually complacent frame of mind as she sat under her spreading cedar-tree one sunny afternoon, awaiting the arrival of her guests. Very handsome and graceful did the elderly lady look in her lace cap with a bright ribbon here and there, and delicate ruffles of the same material at her throat and wrists; very much in keeping with the scene around her—bright with the brightness of maturity, like her own garden—and happy in the consciousness that not one of her friends could display so daintily elegant a tea-table as she had now before her.

The first to arrive, by no means to her regret, were the rector and his wife. The Rev. Theophilus Grant was a rather tall, fattish man, with a double chin, and eyes that yearned at everybody in a clerically affectionate sort of way which many of the ladies thought very sweet. His wife was an energetic, large-boned woman with smooth black hair and a decided look about the lower jaw; great at mothers'-meetings, village concerts, bazaars, and school-treats; excellent in her own walk in life, and not too domineering over her husband. They were a well-matched pair upon the whole, and Mrs. Palliser was very fond of them.

"How do you do, Mrs. Palliser?" said the rector's wife, advancing swiftly towards her hostess. "Such a charming afternoon—your garden looks perfectly lovely. Quite the prettiest garden in the place, I always say."

"How do you *do*?" chimed in the rector in his most unctuous tones, with his head insinuatingly on one side. "So *glad* to see you, I'm sure."

"Hasn't it turned out a fine day?" said Mrs. Palliser, when the reverend couple were safely seated near her. "My husband will be here directly. I hope you don't find the sun too hot, dear Mrs. Grant?"

"Oh, not at all," replied Mrs. Grant, with the air of one who considered herself quite independent of the weather. "I like the heat; it seems to give me new life. Why, we're the first arrivals! I hope we haven't come too soon?"

"My dear Mrs. Grant!" exclaimed the hostess, indignantly.

"I hope that Mr. Palliser is quite well—and Mr. Gerard," remarked the rector, anxiously.

"Oh, quite, thank you," said Mrs. Palliser. "And how did your treat go off last Wednesday—it *was* last Wednesday, wasn't it? I was so sorry I couldn't be there."

"Yes, indeed, we missed you terribly," said the rector's wife, with more politeness than sincerity; for Mrs. Palliser had never honored a school-treat with her presence in her life. "Oh, it was a great success; that is, if one may judge by the amount of buns the children ate. How they can digest such food is a perfect mystery to me; I'd as soon stuff myself with pin-cushions, I declare. However, it doesn't seem to have done them any harm. Then, you know, we had games and races, and Theophilus had to be umpire; but of course he knew nothing of the rules, and some of his decisions were— But dear me, who in the world is this?"

Mrs. Palliser, relieved at the interruption, for she took no manner of interest in school-treats and was beginning to feel slightly bored, turned her head in the direction indicated.

"It looks like an old witch," remarked the rector, tittering.

"Why, it's old Mrs. Palliser, I declare!" exclaimed the hostess, as that venerable lady was seen approaching at a short distance. The rector blushed; but the extraordinary appearance of the newcomer certainly afforded some excuse for his hasty expression. She was wearing a rather short and very skimpy dress, while on her head reposed an enormous cotton sun-bonnet, which entirely hid her face, and so far made up in usefulness for what it lacked in beauty. Mrs. Palliser looked absolutely horrified; but the visitors, as in duty bound, rose from their seats, and hastened to pay their respects. The old lady, apparently quite unconscious of the strange figure she presented, received them with courtesies of the utmost dignity, and loftily declined the rector's arm.

"I need the support of no man, sir, as yet," she said, with tremendous stateliness; "I trust to my own good stick." But she graciously suffered herself to be escorted to an easy chair, and took her seat upon it with the air of a duchess-dowager, at the very least.

Poor Mrs. Palliser, for a few moments, looked the picture of distress. The bright lawn, the pretty flower-beds, the exquisite tea-service with its dainty porcelain and gleaming silver, her own tasteful, well-appointed dress—all, all was ruined by that awful bonnet. No fairer scene, surely, was ever spoiled by so hideous, so ridiculous a blemish. Even the rector and his wife, though of course they were too polite to smile, were evidently alive to the absurdity, and the poor lady's mortification was extreme. A somewhat embarrassed silence fell upon the group; no one could think of an appropriate remark, and the situation grew somewhat strained.

"Is this a party?" suddenly asked the old lady, breaking the spell.

The abruptness of the question only disconcerted Mrs. Palliser the more.

"Well, mother," she said, with a sub-acid smile, "I don't know what you call a party, exactly. Don't you remember my telling you that I had asked a few friends in to tea?"

"Never heard of it till this moment, my dear," replied the old lady, with prompt decision. "You must have dreamt you told me. Not," she added, turning with a most gracious air to the visitors, "that I have the slightest objection. On the contrary, I am proud to welcome both of you."

Mr. Grant murmured something incoherent with his usual ingratiating smile, in which the words "*so glad*" were partly audible. His wife laughed frankly, and said that they were very pleased to be there.

"My dear mother, do you think you'll require that sun-bonnet *all* the afternoon?" said Mrs. Palliser, desperately. The other guests might come any moment now, and she felt she could risk almost anything on the chance of getting rid of it before further arrivals took place.

"I'm sure I can't tell, my dear," replied the old lady, placidly, as she arranged her mittens.

Mrs. Palliser cast a glance of despair at the rector's wife, who made no secret of her amusement. The rector, who plumed himself upon his social diplomacy, thereupon offered the old lady a sunshade, and got promptly snubbed for his pains.

"You don't offer your friends any tea, my dear," was her next remark. "I should like a cup myself too, I think."

"I am only waiting for a few more arrivals," said Mrs. Palliser, with a brave attempt at sprightliness; "you shall soon have your tea, mother. The teapot will be here directly, and there are some of your favorite cakes, you know." The good lady was determined that her arrangements should not be interfered with, and the grievance of that sun-bonnet had made her bold.

Happily, at this juncture several more guests arrived, and the shade of the great cedar-tree was soon pretty fully occupied. Mrs. Chattering and Rosie, the former gushing and eager, the latter all sweetness and propriety, were much *en évidence*; both were among the rector's choicest favorites, and nothing could exceed the affectionate devotion of his greeting. Mrs. Fullerton, a very wealthy

widow with a person as ample as her means, then came rustling up to Mrs. Palliser with a condescending air, assuring her in the most affable manner of the delight she experienced, et cetera, and so on, and so forth; then turned effusively to the old lady, and complimented her upon the unusual vigor of her constitution.

"You're a perfect wonder, Mrs. Palliser, that you are," she exclaimed; "we younger folk may positively envy you. On such a sultry day, too; I haven't known the sun so hot I don't know when."

"Madam," replied the old lady, who was not accustomed to this tone of patronage, "we are all of us thrown into the shade when you are present."

Then Mrs. Fullerton, whose bulk was a sore point, sank abruptly into a seat, and plunged into conversation with Miss Tabor, a submissive-looking spinster in spectacles. Several other guests arrived, all of whom were received by the old lady in her astounding bonnet with the most queenly airs; for somehow it seemed to have got into her head that the party was primarily and especially her own affair, and she had a courtly word for every one. Those whom she remembered she addressed by name, though occasionally by the wrong name; while in the case of one or two whom she had never seen before, she vowed she would have known them anywhere.

"We're all here now, I think, except Dr. Lancaster," observed Mrs. Palliser the younger, dispensing the tea and cakes. She was becoming rather amused by the unexpected airs assumed by the old lady, and laughingly whispered to her next neighbor that it was evident that she herself was deposed for the afternoon.

"Oh! so Dr. Lancaster is coming, is he?" remarked Mrs. Fullerton, in a deep, manly voice.

"He promised to drop in if he could," replied Mrs. Palliser, motioning the servants to hand round the strawberries and cream. "He's such a charming man; don't you think so? He was calling here the other day, and I liked him very much. Ah! here come my husband and Gerard."

The two were seen advancing over the lawn, and a little stir took place among the guests on their approach.

"Don't move, good people, don't move," said Mr. Palliser, in his genial, hearty way, as he shook hands and welcomed everybody. "Well, rector, it's fine harvest weather, isn't it? Ah, Rosie! You're always at your best, isn't she, Mrs. Chattering?"

Then his eye fell upon the extraordinary head-gear of his mother. He stopped, and glared with an expression of bewilderment all around. "My word!" he exclaimed, under his breath; and a suppressed titter, audible to everybody but the object of it, pervaded the entire group.

"Never mind, Marmaduke; don't take any notice," said his wife hastily, in an undertone. "Have a cup of tea. Gerard dear, some tea? Just hand those cakes to Mrs. Fullerton, there's a dear boy. Mrs. Chattering, do take some sugar with your strawberries, it brings out so much more flavor. I suppose you have met Dr. Lancaster by this time, Mr. Grant?"

"Oh yes," replied the rector. "He seems a very—er—good-natured sort of man."

"You met him first at Madame Mirabel's, I think," said Mrs. Chattering, turning to her hostess. "Of course; I remember what we were saying, you know, when I met you that afternoon, about him and the Mirabels knowing each other so well."

"What *you* were saying you mean, my dear Mrs. Chattering," corrected Mrs. Palliser, smiling. "I know nothing at all about it."

"He's a very close man," said Mrs. Fullerton, helping herself to a substantial wedge of cake. "I've such a very open, candid nature myself that I always distrust those reserved people. I can't get on with them. Why should they make a secret about themselves? I never make any secret about *myself*! But then, indeed, there's no reason why I should, which of course mayn't be the case with everybody."

"Ah," assented Mrs. Chattering. "That's what *I* say. And it's the same thing precisely with the Mirabels. I can't tell you how good of you I thought it was to go and see Madame Mirabel that day, now she's in such trouble about her husband. I don't really think I could have made the effort; in fact I haven't the time, what with all my poor people to look after—and they do take such a deal of looking after, you know—nor the strength either. One must take care of one's self you know, if one wants to do any good, and really, now, in the case of the Mirabels, who come from nobody knows where, and have never shown themselves in the least sociable—I suppose you don't know them, do you, Mr. Grant?"

"Er—no," replied Mr. Grant, shaking his head. "The fact is I never call upon any new-comers before they appear in church; and hitherto—"

"Exactly," interrupted Mrs. Chattering. "A most excellent rule; most excellent. Of course, if people don't go to church it shows they don't belong to *us*; and one must draw the line somewhere, or there's no knowing where we should all find ourselves. Why, there have been cases where people who have been received in society, and no questions asked, have turned out the most dreadful characters; why, there was one person not so very long ago—no, two persons, a mother and daughter—going out to India, you know, and positively courted by everybody on board because they sang and played so well, and what do you think they were? . Actually, the mother kept a *café chantant* in Pondicherry! And I believe there was one young man, of very high family indeed, who was on the point of proposing, positively proposing, to the girl; you know what these Frenchwomen are like—with their airs and their graces and their *savoir faire* they might take in anybody; so that really I quite shudder when I think what risks one runs, and it makes me ever so careful. Now *you've* seen the world, haven't you, Mr. Palliser; and don't you think I'm right?"

"My dear lady," replied that magnate with his most portentous air, "I think that in all such matters every woman of the world should be a law unto herself. As you say, I've seen a good deal of the world in my time, and I fancy I know most sides of human nature pretty well. I have studied it in camps and in cities, in council-chambers, in the hunting-field, in the castles of the aristocracy, in drawing-rooms, and—er—when I was a young man—er—even in green-rooms; I have courted and I have been courted; I have been brought into contact with men and women of all ranks and conditions in life; and as far as my own observations go—"

"Gerard, dear, I wish you'd give Rosie some more strawberries," whispered Mrs. Palliser under cover of her husband's words. "And then go and sit by her, can't you, you provoking boy? The poor child's been left to herself all the afternoon."

The youth stirred himself somewhat slowly in obedience to his mother's behest, heaping a plate with strawberries, cakes, cream, and thin bread-and-butter in the most reckless style. Rosie received it with her usual unsuspecting innocence, and thought that Gerard was being very kind to her. Mr. Palliser meanwhile continued his prolation with great enjoyment, dwelling upon his many wonderful experiences in the past to the delight and amazement of his guests; a subdued chatter rose upon all sides, accompanied by the chink of cups and spoons, when, suddenly, an inarticulate excla-

mation from Mrs. Palliser attracted the general attention. The poor lady had sunk back in her chair, and was gazing with a look of horrified distress at a card which one of the servants had just handed to her.

"What's the matter?" demanded her husband, making himself the spokesman of the assembly.

"It's Madame Mirabel!" answered Mrs. Palliser, faintly. Then, recovering herself—"She has come to return my call. How strange that she should have happened to choose this afternoon!"

"Well, my dear, I call it very fortunate," said Mr. Palliser. "I'd better go and bring her back with me. Where have you left the lady, Jane?"

But Gerard was already half-way to the house; forgetful of poor Rosie and her strawberries, forgetful of everything but the fact that this beautiful woman was actually under his very roof, and would have to be courteously treated in the presence of all her enemies. Two minutes afterwards he was seen returning across the lawn with her, and a subdued rustle of excitement passed through the throng of ladies as they gazed upon the new arrival. Then Mr. and Mrs. Palliser advanced to meet her, and offered her a courteous welcome.

There was no doubt that she was looking her very best, and the cold, proud, distant air she wore certainly sat well upon her. The elderly ladies received her with at least equal reserve, but one or two of the younger ones rather admired her, while old Mrs. Palliser greeted her with the stateliest cordiality, and said she remembered her distinctly. For a moment Madame Mirabel stared at her in frank bewilderment, but on understanding who she was responded to the old lady's welcome very civilly.

Mrs. Palliser soon made up her mind to make the best of an unfortunate *contretemps*, and, when she realized the stony reception her new guest had met with from the other ladies, determined to befriend her. In this resolve she was ably seconded by her husband, who rather admired Madame Mirabel, and plumed himself upon his courtier-like demeanor towards the fair sex. He secured her a comfortable chair between himself and his wife, opened a chatty conversation in which he took care that she should participate, and treated her in his very finest style of paternal courtesy. Gerard took a seat at a little distance, quite oblivious of poor Rosie and her prior claims, and watched with considerable interest the benevolent attentions paid by his parents to the "poor young

woman," as Mrs. Palliser now called her in her heart. But it soon became evident to all that the poor young woman was perfectly well able to take care of herself. She showed not the slightest embarrassment as she sat there in her bright, hard beauty, with her teacup in her hand, exposed to the full gaze of those curious and unfriendly eyes. Her own eyes, blue and vivid, sparkled with a sarcastic sense of the humor of the situation, and she accepted the civilities of her entertainers with the completest indifference and *sang-froid*.

The conversation, after a brief period of discursiveness, turned on modern literature. Of this Mr. Palliser's knowledge was extremely superficial; but he had plenty to say, and Madame Mirabel soon found herself listening with some amusement to the good gentleman's fluent utterances. The others listened too, but not so critically, and at last Mrs. Fullerton, who was not accustomed to finding herself in the background upon such occasions, thought the time had come to remind the company of the fact.

"You seem fond of literature," she said in her deep voice, bending her black brows on Madame Mirabel. "Well, I've no objection to literature myself—none in the world, so long as it's judiciously chosen. In fact, I've been a great reader in my day, and I've marked out courses of reading for several young women of my acquaintance. There's Paley's 'Evidences,' for instance, and Young's *Night Thoughts*—excellent books, which I dare say you may have heard of. Perhaps you've read them. And I don't know that I object even to novels, so long as they've a good moral tendency. I remember how delighted I was with *Thaddeus of Warsaw* when I was rather younger than I am now. Miss Yonge, too; I suppose you've read *The Heir of Redclyffe*? Then I dare say you've heard of Miss Martineau; well, her *Deerbrook* I can thoroughly recommend, though I shouldn't advise any young person to read her later works—ah, she got very different as she grew older, very different indeed."

"I believe I remember reading *Deerbrook* when I was a child," replied Madame Mirabel, demurely, "and somebody gave me *The Heir of Redclyffe* for a birthday present when I was ten years old."

Mrs. Fullerton felt rather snubbed, and one or two of the ladies smiled. Madame Mirabel continued:

"I am glad you have so pronounced a taste for novels with a tendency. What is your opinion of Tolstoi?"

"Who?" asked Mrs. Fullerton.

"Tolstoi," replied Madame Mirabel, politely. "Of course you've read the *Kreutzer Sonata*?"

"I don't read German," said Mrs. Fullerton, rather shortly.

"Tolstoi is a Russian," said Madame Mirabel with a mischievous look in her eyes. "No doubt you have read him in English. I only mentioned him because he is representative of a type—the interpreter in Russia of that realistic movement which has produced what is called Ibsenism in Norway and the *décadent* school in France; all widely different, of course, and yet all embodying the same protest against the obsolete ideals of the past. You should read the Russian novelists; I think they would interest you extremely."

Mrs. Fullerton stared in helpless bewilderment. She would have given worlds to find some way of snubbing this terrible young woman in return, but for the moment she was powerless. At last she muttered something about such works being entirely beyond her reach.

"But you can get them at any railway station," said Madame Mirabel.

"And pray what is the tendency — er — of the books you refer to?" asked the rector, blandly.

"One that you would consider somewhat revolutionary, I dare say," replied Madame Mirabel, who, having satisfactorily crushed Mrs. Fullerton, was quite ready to tackle Mr. Grant. "At any rate, it might be well for you to read any of them that you came across before adding them to the village library."

"I read a French novel once," acknowledged the rector, "and I found that quite enough. I have never read one since."

"What was it, may I ask?" said Madame Mirabel.

"Well—er—it was called *Sœur Anne*, by Paul de Kock," replied the rector, hesitatingly.

"Oh yes," said Madame Mirabel. "A pretty little book in its way, but rather too sentimental. I can't say I care for novels very much myself, except a few of the very best. In fact, it is rather a mistake to read any books of whatever description unless they are the best of their kind."

"But what is your standard of the 'best' in literature?" asked the rector, beginning to feel himself in the presence of an enemy.

"The best books are those which deal only with indisputable facts, and give you the greatest number of perfectly new ideas," answered Madame Mirabel.

"H'm-m," muttered the rector, assuming a judicial frown. "I'm scarcely—er—prepared to pronounce upon such a definition off-hand. What *are* facts? What, in other words, is truth? That is the question." Then, willing to show that Madame Mirabel was not the only learned person present—"Besides, the limits you place are too narrow and severe. You remember Juvenal's line—*Simul et jucunda et idonea dicere vitæ*. That takes in all literature not exclusively—er—of a religious nature."

"You mean Horace, don't you?" remarked Madame Mirabel, calmly.

The rector colored with mortification. It was no use entering the lists with this intellectual amazon, who had such a knack of inflicting humiliation upon everybody rash enough to tackle her. "Ah, Horace—did I say Juvenal?" he said, confusedly, as he passed Mrs. Chattering's empty cup. Mrs. Palliser, though not able to follow the conversation very closely, had a pretty clear perception that Madame Mirabel was making havoc among her guests, and was meditating a politic diversion when the arrival of Dr. Lancaster rendered the attempt unnecessary.

"You have come quite opportunely," said Madame Mirabel, as soon as the doctor was seated and greetings had been exchanged. "We are discussing the merits of rival schools in literature, and you are expected to contribute something to the symposium."

"But you mustn't include us all, Madame Mirabel," interposed Mrs. Chattering, who had been longing for an opportunity to get in a word. "Most of us have been listeners, I think. We can't all talk Latin and read Russian story-books, though I'm very fond of certain French authors, you know— Oh yes, I don't at all object to foreign literature as some people might, but I make it a rule never to read a French book that hasn't been recommended to me by somebody whose judgment I can trust. By-the-way, Rosie, what was that book you got for me the other day—why, it was *you* that recommended it, Mr. Gerard—of course, I remember now; Rabble something—I've such an infamous memory for names; written by a French clergyman, you know; but all I can say is that if you call that French, it's different from my notion of French, for I couldn't make out a line of it, what with words I'd never seen before, and the most disgraceful spelling I ever met with in my life."

"I dare say Madame Mirabel could tell you all about it," remarked Mrs. Fullerton, dryly; "her memory seems as good as her knowledge of literature is extensive."

"Really, Mrs. Fullerton," protested Madame Mirabel, "you mustn't pay me so extravagant a compliment simply because I happen to have read *Deerbrook* and *The Heir of Redclyffe*. They are such favorite books, you know, especially the latter. Every child must have read it, I should think."

Mrs. Fullerton had it on her lips to retort, "I am glad to hear that you have ever read anything so respectable," but had prudence enough to keep it in.

"Do you find much time for reading?" asked Dr. Lancaster, turning to the rector.

Mr. Grant pursed up his lips and shook his head. "Very little indeed," he said; "the cares of a scattered parish like this, you know—I did all my reading when I was a young man."

"Still, it is well to keep abreast with modern thought," remarked the doctor. "I suppose there have never been fifty years in the world's history so rich in intellectual activity and its results as the latter half of the present century. You see it in all directions—scientific, philosophical, and theological, as well as in belles-lettres. Thought is now, almost for the first time in Europe, absolutely free from shackles, and she is making a noble use of her liberty."

"Ah," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, shaking her head doubtfully. "I'm afraid that free thought is a rather dangerous sort of liberty for most people."

"Only because they are not quite accustomed to it," said the doctor, smiling. "But take my own profession; what does it not owe to free thought? At one time the practice of medicine was entirely empirical, and really I think Molière was about right when he made the doctors angry at the recovery of a patient who ought to have died under the orthodox treatment. Well, what was once a system of respectable quackery is now fast becoming one of the most progressive sciences in the world; and that is owing to free thought, to untrammelled investigation—nothing else."

"Which reminds me," suddenly cried Mrs. Chattering, "about those medicine-bottles. Dr. Lancaster, I do so wish you'd speak to some of the cottagers about here. You know I do a little simple dispensing myself in a small way, and for months I've been doctoring some of the old women for their rheumatism and one thing and another, and now, doctor, do you know the ungrateful old creatures evade taking my medicine in every possible way, even going so far as to throw the very bottles out of the windows,

I do call it so wasteful and so ungrateful of them, and I thought I'd speak to you about it, because you of all men must know how important it is that they should take the stuff that's given them by those who know more about their requirements than they do themselves."

"My dear madam," replied Dr. Lancaster, "I think it only right you should know that the cottagers are not guilty of the offence that you impute to them."

"Not guilty!" cried Mrs. Chattering. "But I tell you I've seen it myself. Who did it, then, if they didn't?"

"I did," said the doctor. "The confession you have forced from me is a painful one, no doubt, but it has to be made. I, and I alone, am the guilty person."

Mrs. Chattering was struck dumb with astonishment and indignation at this frank avowal. Mrs. Fullerton stared, and, putting up her double eye-glass, waited for the inevitable explosion. Mrs. Palliser looked uneasy, and wished that Dr. Lancaster had been a little more diplomatic.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, when she found utterance. "Of course, if I had known that, I should never have appealed to you at all. May I ask *why* you—why you—er—"

"My dear lady," said Dr. Lancaster, very suavely, "had I known that it was you who were my benevolent rival, I should have acted differently. But this is the first time I have had the honor of meeting you. The fact is, that when a patient is subjected to two different courses of treatment at the same time, the result is likely to be somewhat prejudicial to the patient; the effect aimed at by one of the practitioners does not come off, and complications may not improbably ensue which will baffle the skill of either. I would not for a moment impugn *your* skill, far less your benevolence; and you can always retaliate by throwing my bottles out of the window if you like, you know. But I think—quite apart from any professional feeling—that it would be wiser to let me have a chance, and see whether such skill as I possess may not help to further your own benevolence, of which you have given such very sterling proofs according to what I am told on every side."

Mrs. Palliser began to breathe again, and thought that really the doctor had got out of it rather well. Mrs. Chattering looked a little doubtful for a moment, and then her face began to clear. She was just about to reply when Mrs. Fullerton struck in.

"May I ask, Dr. Lancaster, whether you're a believer in the efficacy of drugs?" she said, abruptly.

"Drugs?" replied the doctor, rather surprised. "In certain cases, of course; not in all. The fewer drugs we use the better; but it is impossible to dispense with them altogether. We require their assistance to neutralize poisons formed within the diseased organism—to act as antidotes, in fact. Diseased processes are now regarded as modified physiological processes, the pathological being as truly natural as the physiological; and the aim of treatment is, not to attack disease as an enemy, but to remove the conditions which have led to the change from normal to abnormal working. We employ drugs to assist natural processes, that is all; the tendency of nature is always recuperative, and prophylactics are ancillary in their operations merely."

Mrs. Fullerton looked puzzled, and wished she had not spoken.

"I confess," continued Dr. Lancaster, after a pause, "that I hold views respecting the future of medicine which some persons might consider visionary. Just as, according to Herbert Spencer, the ultimate aim of Government should be to render the institution itself unnecessary, so, I believe, the development of medical science will have an analogous result. The earliest phases of the healing art were utterly unscientific. They were the veriest hocus-pocus—on a level with fetichism, if not below it. Then we had the quackeries in vogue in the Middle Ages, when bleeding was considered almost a panacea, and fever patients were shut up in rooms from which every breath of fresh air was rigorously excluded, and prophylactic virtues were supposed to lurk in the skins of frogs, rats' livers, and—in cases of scrofula—the hands of a reigning king. The last superstition was in existence as late as the reign of George the First. At present empiricism still lingers, but then we recognize it as such; and it is dying rapidly. The time is approaching, I believe, when drugs will be a thing of the past. Prevention will take the place of cure. Medical science will move forward in two parallel lines—one tending to modify the virulence of maladies themselves, the other changing altogether the treatment of the maladies thus enfeebled, substituting for the use of pills and potions the inherent forces of nature, whatever they may be called, which make for the recuperation of the tissue—magnetism, electricity, molecular energy, the power of the very mind itself."

"That sounds all very wonderful," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, admiringly. "We certainly do live in most extraordinary times, don't we, Mrs. Chattering? Really I feel quite afraid, sometimes, lest

we should be meddling with things we were never meant to, you know. But it's very wonderful, very ; there's no doubt about that."

"It all seems to me rather impious," remarked Mrs. Chattering, coldly. "What do you think about it, Mr. Grant?"

"H'm-m," murmured the rector, very judiciously. "I doubt whether we shall ever see a time when sickness will be stamped out. Sickness, we must remember, is the divinely appointed consequence of sin ; and till we are all sinless we can scarcely look for the end of physical suffering. Certainly we have no Scriptural ground to go upon there. And then with regard to the remedies of the future—well, much may be done, no doubt, by the advance of science, and improvements in sanitation, and so on ; but when it comes to will-power, and vital energy, and such things as that, why it almost seems to me as though we should be arrogating the attributes of God Himself, who alone has the power of arresting the course of sickness by a word."

"Dear me ! I never thought of that," said Mrs. Palliser, much distressed.

"I believe the only remedy sanctioned in Scripture is rubbing the patient with oil, isn't it?" asked Madame Mirabel, speaking to the rector. "I think, if I remember rightly, doctors are altogether ignored, and the parish clergyman has to be sent for to perform the required operation. May I ask whether it has always proved efficacious, in your experience?"

"I wonder what St. Luke can have thought of that injunction," remarked the doctor. "If I had been in his place I should have taken it as a decided slight."

"The ceremony you refer to," said the rector, after a preliminary clearing of his throat, "is not one which the Church has ever regarded as binding upon her. The conditions under which we live are—er—somewhat different from those in St. James's day. The Divine blessing is now vouchsafed to such—er—recognized remedies as are administered by duly qualified practitioners. And I am decidedly of opinion that the use of such mysterious powers as Dr. Lancaster has hinted at would involve a sin of presumption. It is not given to man to meddle with things that are above his sphere. Indeed, it appears to me that any attempt of the sort is of the essence of witchcraft, which we find so strongly denounced in Holy Writ."

"In other words," said Madame Mirabel, "the Almighty has no objection to patronize Turkey rhubarb or a quinine pill, but draws

the line at all higher developments of pathological science as an infringement of the Divine prerogative?"

Poor Mr. Grant looked terribly shocked at this, and scarcely knew what to reply. Mr. Palliser chuckled, and shook his head doubtfully; Mrs. Palliser ejaculated, "O my dear Madame Mirabel!" under her breath, and most of the other ladies put on very frosty airs. That they were rather shocked at what they considered Madame Mirabel's profanity was true enough, though they by no means shared the rector's distrust of Dr. Lancaster's views, considering them, indeed, rather attractive than otherwise; but what offended them most was the lady's coolness and independence, and the calm way in which she showed her mental superiority. It was unfeminine, to say the least of it; and, truth to tell, there was just a dash of questionable taste in Madame Mirabel, as might be seen in her heavily befeathered hat, which contrasted so strangely with the modish severity of her dress generally. Meanwhile the main channel of conversation broke up into small separate rills, which flowed smoothly on without encountering any more quicksands or sunken reefs; and soon a movement was made for dispersal, rather, it must be confessed, to the satisfaction of the hostess. The poor lady's anticipations had been upset in several particulars, and she experienced a certain vague sense of disappointment as she bade her guests farewell; still, there could be no doubt that her little party would have been less lively if the disturbing element had not been introduced, and the ladies would now have something to talk about when they got home. If only Gerard had performed his duty rather better! But he had been utterly neglectful of that poor, dear child, and seemed to have eyes and ears for nobody but that dreadful woman. Then the old lady, who had fallen asleep quite early in the afternoon, woke up; looked vaguely about her, settled her sun-bonnet (which had fallen awry) under the impression, apparently, that it was a nightcap, and finally crowned the achievements of the day by addressing Madame Mirabel, in a most dignified adieu, as Mrs. Lancaster:

Gerard, of course, had made up his mind to see the lady home. She out-manœuvred him, however, giving him to understand that the doctor was to be her escort; a rather bitter pill for Gerard, and but slightly sweetened by her remark that no doubt they would meet on the morrow. The fact was, she had something to say to Dr. Lancaster, and he, on his side, had something to say to her.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THE PARTY

JUST as life would be fairly endurable were it not for its pleasures, so would society be much happier if only its members could contrive to rub along without everlastingly falling in love. It is all nonsense to say we owe the evils which afflict us to an act of *gourmandise*, or disobedience, or curiosity—whichever element may have constituted the sin of it—on the part of the primeval woman. The fatal moment was when Adam fell in love with Eve. Of course, the apple about which we hear so much may have been a love-apple—nothing more likely; something of the same nature, I mean, as the mandrakes of Leah, and unfortunately as efficacious; but that is not the point. It matters not how the disaster was brought about. Eve exercised her arts of fascination; Adam succumbed without a struggle; and ever since that most direful and pregnant event the tragedy of it has been repeated a thousand million times. And the men can't help it. They can no more help it, apparently, than the descendant of a hundred dipsomaniacs can continue a teetotaller. The cant of a woman's hat, the bow on a woman's shoe, the oscillation of a woman's dress-improver, the leer of a woman's eye, seem to drive some men mad. And for countless ages every woman has honestly imagined her sex to be the one irresistible thing in nature; the most powerful, the most beautiful, the most angelic. Why should she not? She has been told so through all the centuries; poets, philosophers, novelists, dramatists, negro-melodists, and music-hall bards all harp upon the well-known theme, all sing the same worn-out song. It is a strange madness. It is a most noxious whimsey. Hatred has slain its thousands, but love its tens of thousands. No doubt there *are* sweet women in the world—sweet as human beings, not necessarily as women—who are as violets in a field of dandelions; the comforters, the sympathizers, the inspirers and the friends of men. But where these exist they are easily and directly recognizable. They do not prink and preen themselves; their address is simple,

straightforward, un-self-conscious; they are peace-loving, and divide no friends; they are not given to wearing dress-improvers; and they never leer.

Influenza had not invaded Hampshire at the time of which we are writing, but the other disease is always about; and Gerard had caught it. One knows how a man feels when he is just beginning to sicken for something serious. There is peculiar restlessness, a vague, indefinable *malaise*, a loss of appetite, and an irritability as distressing to the patient as to other people. Gerard experienced something of the same sensations. Always inclined to be taciturn, he now became uniformly silent—sometimes, even, just a little morose; nervously eager to meet the author of his malady, nervously elated when in her presence, nervously despondent afterwards if her manner to him had not been all that he had hoped or longed for. We need not dwell upon his symptoms. They are nearly always the same in such cases as his, making the sufferer a misery to himself, and more or less of a nuisance to his friends.

Of course his mother had no serious suspicion of all this. Mothers seldom have. The good lady was a little annoyed at Gerard's persistent blindness to the pink charms of Rosie Chattering, and wondered somewhat impatiently that he should be on such sympathetic terms with the Mirabels; but that there was anything deeper than the most ordinary friendship between them never entered her innocent head. Mr. Palliser saw plainly enough that Gerard admired the lady; indeed, with his experience of cities and castles and courts, he had a practised eye for such infatuations; yet even he had no more notion than his wife of the virulence of his son's distemper. The attack had been incubating for some weeks, during which period the patient himself was scarcely conscious of it, and consequently showed no external indications; now, however, it declared itself in a most unmistakable manner, and poor Gerard had to bear it and conceal it as best he might.

It was on the afternoon we have just been describing that Gerard awoke to the full realization of his plight, the enlightening process having been set on foot by jealousy. When Madame Mirabel declined his escort, and went away with Dr. Lancaster, with whom she seemed on such very confidential terms, the pain he experienced was that, and nothing else. He saw in Dr. Lancaster a rival, and a rather formidable one. Of course he had not the slightest ground for any such suspicion, for not a word had ever passed between Madame Mirabel and the physician which all

Hampshire might not have heard; but Gerard was in love, and his mental vision was as much perverted as that of a man with jaundice. He might, indeed, have been considerably edified could he have listened to their conversation.

"I think you must have made a rather favorable impression upon some of those people this afternoon," Madame Mirabel remarked, as they strolled quietly across the heather in the direction of the Seven Thorns.

"Did I talk so much nonsense?" answered Dr. Lancaster, with a grave smile.

Madame Mirabel laughed. "I fancy you succeeded in spite of yourself," she said. "The clergyman was the only one who seemed to me at all ruffled. What a creature! It is simply wonderful to me that any person who can read and write *can* be so ignorant. I suppose it's the natural result of his system. As for that Mrs. Chattering, I think your victory was complete."

"I hope so, for the sake of my patients," returned the doctor.

"Do you know," said Madame Mirabel, after a pause, "that you managed to puzzle *me*, rather, by some of the things you said?"

"Indeed I did not know it," replied Dr. Lancaster, surprised. "What do you refer to?"

"Well," answered Madame Mirabel with a hesitation very unusual to her, "I refer to some of the opinions you expressed about the future of medicine. Am I to understand that you really believe in all the modern jargon about brain-waves, telepathy, and the rest of it?"

"I never believe in jargon of any sort," said Dr. Lancaster, quite seriously. "Telepathy and brain-waves are simply expressions which have no more than an *ad interim* value for certain alleged phenomena which are now undergoing investigation. Until the investigation is complete I do not profess to form a judgment. I can only say that appearances are in favor of the theory that a new and hitherto unknown sphere is being gradually opened up to scientific scrutiny."

"You mean that you are quite prepared to believe in the objectivity of mind, and its influence on material objects," remarked Madame Mirabel. "Well, I am not."

"It would be rather unreasonable to expect a lady who does not acknowledge the existence of the mind to believe in its influence on anything," replied Dr. Lancaster, very dryly.

Madame Mirabel waved her hand with a slightly impatient gesture, implying that such a quibble was surely beneath persons of their seriousness and culture. "Remarks of that sort would be more suitably bestowed on Mr. Grant," she said, with a shade of stiffness. "Tell me frankly what your views are. Take hypnotism, for instance. Has it any scientific basis?"

"It must have," replied the doctor. "I'm not going to be trapped into an adjudication upon its claims, because I don't know enough about it; but my beliefs are strongly in its favor. It has been satisfactorily proved that by it one man can control the thoughts of another, can affect his health, can even change his character. You have only to read the reports drawn up every now and then at Nancy and La Salpêtrière to come to the same conclusion. Charcot, Liébeault, and the other practitioners of the art are not quacks; they are men of the very highest scientific character, and the results they have achieved are beyond dispute. But of the exact process, physiologically speaking, by which those results are brought about, I know too little to speak."

Madame Mirabel was silent for a minute or two, revolving what Lancaster had said. At last she inquired, with some earnestness,

"And do you suppose that these phenomena are ever produced unconsciously?"

"How do you mean?" said Lancaster. "What—whether one person can hypnotize another without knowing it?"

"Precisely," assented Madame Mirabel.

"Ah, that is a difficult question," replied Lancaster. "I am not aware of any authoritative utterances upon the point. It is, of course, claimed by the telepathists; and if—if, I say—it is possible for one person to influence another at a distance unconsciously, I do not see why he should not at close quarters. Many of the alleged cases of telepathy are represented as having been unconsciously, that is, without deliberate intention, produced by the agents. Even when there has been a wish, there has often been no conscious or calculated design."

Madame Mirabel looked thoughtful, and for the moment made no reply.

"By-the-way," resumed the doctor, after a pause, "there's something I want to say to you upon another and rather more important matter. It's about your husband. Haven't you noticed any change in him of late?"

"It has struck me that he seemed stronger," answered Madame Mirabel, glancing up.

"He is so much stronger," said Dr. Lancaster, with emphasis, "that I confess myself entirely at a loss to account for it. The improvement is quite extraordinary. When I first took up the case he was a dying man. At present—well, I don't believe he is. His appetite, his pulse, his complexion, his breathing, all show a marked amelioration. In fact, there seems to have been a steady increase of vitality in him, and if only this can be maintained we may look forward to some years of life for him yet. You see I speak quite frankly to you. I cannot tell to what all this is due; it may come to a stop as causelessly as it has set in; but there is no doubt of his state at present. He is worlds better than he was the first time I saw him some six weeks ago."

"Do you mean to say that he is going to recover?" asked Madame Mirabel, in astonishment.

"Certainly not," said the doctor; "the case is altogether too perplexing to justify me in any such prediction. At present he is decidedly gaining ground; that is all I can say with any certitude. My own calculations are temporarily, at any rate, upset. I can only continue to watch him very carefully, and try to discover, if possible, the source of the enhanced vitality he shows."

"I don't understand it at all," said Madame Mirabel; "it sounds almost incredible. Surely you must have altered the treatment in some way?"

"In no important point whatever," replied Lancaster.

"Of course I have noticed an improvement," resumed Madame Mirabel, "and so has young Palliser. In fact, he has mentioned it to me once or twice, and his observations agreed with mine. But, as you put it, the news is a complete surprise to me."

"Then I am all the more fortunate in being able to bring you such unexpected happiness," replied Lancaster, with a singularly winning smile. "Only don't count too much upon it. I say nothing about the future, and am quite unable to draw any conclusions from the past."

"You are too modest, Dr. Lancaster," said Madame Mirabel, banteringly. "In the Middle Ages you would have been burned for a magician."

"That is a high compliment," said the doctor. "The race has died out, I am afraid."

"It is only the name that is changed," retorted Madame Mirabel,

darting a curious look at him. "At present we call them—hypnotists."

Dr. Lancaster started, and met her gaze in wonderment. "Hypnotists?" he repeated. "I am no hypnotist. Do you really believe that I have been hypnotizing your husband?"

Madame Mirabel laughed gayly, and shook her head. "No; I'm not going to commit myself," she said, with an approach to playfulness. "I shall take a lesson in caution from you, and decline to 'draw conclusions,' as you phrase it. I don't want to pry into matters too deep or too high for me, as the clergyman would say."

"But seriously—"

"But seriously, Dr. Lancaster, I have nothing more to add," she interrupted, with a gayety of manner which her companion suspected to be half-assumed. "I believe everything you tell me and nothing more; will not that appease you?"

"I am sure you have the fullest faith in me," said Lancaster, half-tentatively, with a grave smile.

"In whom should I have faith, if not in you!" she exclaimed, with sudden passion. Then, in a calmer tone, "Of course you understand me. You have studied these subjects; I have not. I was only jesting just now. You seemed so entirely at a loss to account for Gaston's improvement that it occurred to me to start a conjecture on my own account."

The doctor laughed, and made an indifferent reply. They were getting near their destination now, but the afternoon was so bright and genial and the moorland air so invigorating that neither felt anxious to go in. Lancaster offered a few desultory remarks as they strolled along, more for the sake of keeping up a show of conversation than for any other reason, to which his companion responded more or less at hap-hazard. She was not listening to what he said. She was turning over in her own mind certain things that puzzled her, and to which she could get no clew. A solid, undeniable fact on one side; on the other, scraps of talk, fugitive suggestions, unsupported theories about a subject she had always considered beneath the notice of those scientific blue eyes of hers; and now she was trying to unravel the skein of it all, and see whether she could bring order out of the curious jumble. First there was the great fact of her husband's unmistakable improvement—an improvement which the physician had distinctly confessed himself unable to account for on scientific grounds. Then there were those scraps of talk. Lancaster had said that

cases had been known in which the state of a man's health was affected by the hypnotic or magnetic influence of another. He himself was no hypnotist; repudiated the suggestion with something of indignation, indeed; and yet, in the same breath, acknowledged the possibility of magnetic influence being exercised *unconsciously*. That gave her pause. Still, all that amounted to nothing. There was not a shade, not an atom, of proof that any connection existed between the fact on one hand and the theories on the other. She had not then heard the remark that had fallen so carelessly from her husband's lips in his recent conversation with Gerard, but she was to hear it that very evening, and it was bound to deepen the impression already occupying her mind.

They found him in the garden basking in the warm rays of the westering sun. He looked wonderfully better; a skeleton, of course, and weak, but with new life, new health, shining in his eyes.

"I feel almost strong again," he said, lazily, as he got into bed an hour later. "Lancaster is a wonderful fellow. He does nothing to me, and yet he makes me well. He sits, and he talks, and he looks me in the eye with his brave glance, and he holds me by the hand, and I get new strength, somehow. Life is very pleasant after all. Ah! how sleepy I am. Yes, it is very strange. It seems as though it were the influence of the man himself."

The influence of the man himself. How strangely, how appositely the words fell upon her ear! A new world of possibilities seemed suddenly to open before her. Up till that day she had known nothing, suspected nothing. She had marked the improvement in Gaston's health, and at first had set it down simply as one of those transient, treacherous gleams of a revival which is impossible that are so characteristic of pulmonary disease. The improvement continued, and then she began to wonder. Still, no idea that it might be permanent dawned upon her mind. It was curious, certainly, that the patient should gain so much strength, and it was this that was puzzling her when she spoke to Gerard about it, and asked him—a strange request!—to see if he could get any light from Dr. Lancaster. From this it may be inferred that the doctor had been very reserved in his communications to Madame Mirabel. It was not till they were walking home together from Mrs. Palliser's that he spoke out, and what he said had taken her utterly by surprise. She knew her husband was better—temporarily better; but that he was actually mending, might even get

altogether well and live for years, came like a revelation to her, and it was a difficult matter to conceal the profoundness of her emotion.

The Pallisers had lingered in the garden after the departure of their guests; Gerard, obstinately blind to his mother's signals to him to accompany the Chatterings, smoking one cigarette after another, and the old lady, refreshed by her nap, evincing unusual liveliness. Mrs. Palliser, mildly excited by the events of the afternoon, was only too glad to discuss them with anybody; while Mr. Palliser, always more or less of a saunterer, threw himself back in a comfortable cane chair, enjoying the evening breeze.

"I think it went off very well on the whole," remarked his wife, complacently. "But I never was more taken aback in my life than when that Madame Mirabel sent in her card. It did seem to me the most unfortunate coincidence! Of course I should never have dreamed of inviting her to meet all those people. You're sure you didn't know she was coming, Gerard?"

"How should I know?" said Gerard, astonished.

"Well, my dear, I can't say, I'm sure," replied his mother, rather shortly. "You seem very intimate with them, that's all. But I must say I don't wonder at people not liking her very much. There's such a self-assertiveness about her, and an appearance of wanting to set down everybody else. The way she spoke to the rector, for instance—and that good old Mrs. Fullerton! No, I don't like her, and I'm afraid I never shall."

"Surely you can't blame Madame Mirabel because Mrs. Fullerton and the rector are ignorant," remarked Gerard, mildly. "I thought she paid them altogether too high a compliment in talking to them as though they were her equals."

"Oh, I don't say she isn't clever," said Mrs. Palliser; "but it's what I call a bad sort of cleverness. I'm sure she's been badly brought up. No woman of really nice feeling would show off as she did this afternoon. I felt sorry for her when she first came, because I thought she was received so coldly; but when I saw how thoroughly self-possessed she was, and how well she knew how to hold her own, well, I didn't pity her any more."

"I rather enjoyed watching her," said Mr. Palliser. "A handsome woman calmly, and without effort, discomfiting a host of foes with their own weapons, is, to me, an amusing sight. In fact, I think myself that she's a very charming person."

"Oh, Marmaduke!" exclaimed his wife.

"And I think so too," put in the old lady. "She has a fine air—a fine air, and a fine way with her altogether. It isn't often one sees manners of that sort nowadays, I think, among the younger people."

"No, indeed; and I'm very glad it isn't," said Mrs. Palliser, sharply. "I like young women to be quiet and modest and proper. I've no notion of persons who go flaunting about in that aggressive way and flying in other people's faces."

"You prefer Rosie Chattering, mother, don't you?" remarked Gerard, emitting a fine blue thread of smoke.

"Dear child!" exclaimed the good lady; "yes, indeed I do. A dear, sweet, natural, unsophisticated girl as ever lived. You may say what you like, Gerard, but those are the girls who are a blessing to their mothers and their husbands. Always sweet-tempered, never contradicting their elders, regular at church—ah, don't tell me about your Madame Mirabels. One girl like Rosie Chattering is worth a dozen of them."

"So clever, too—so well read—such sound literary judgment," murmured Gerard, in his very laziest voice.

"My dear," retorted his mother, quite angrily for her, "I've no patience with you. You bring everything to the standard of books and education and things of that sort. It's perfectly shocking. Dear Rosie reads quite as much as is good for her, I'm sure; and her mother, no doubt, exercises a wise supervision over *what* she reads. I don't believe in so much reading, for my part, particularly in these days, when so many wicked books are written. Look at Madame Mirabel again—the books I found upon her table were something perfectly dreadful. No decent person would have had them in the house. But it's always the same with these people who have no religion. They think that cleverness is everything and morality nothing, and that if they only *know* enough, or think they do, nothing more is necessary. I've heard all about these modern theories that you're so fond of, and how many souls they ruin every year."

"Really?" said Gerard. "I wasn't aware there were any statistics published. Never mind, mother; Madame Mirabel may be rather omnivorous in her reading, but there's a good side to that as well as a bad one, you know. I lent her a very pious book myself only the other day."

"You?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "I never heard of such a thing since I was born. A pious book! What was it, pray?"

"*Literature and Dogma*, by Matthew Arnold," replied Gerard, innocently.

"Matthew Arnold, indeed!" uttered Mrs. Palliser, mistrustful and disappointed.

"He's acknowledged to be a respectable writer, at any rate," said Gerard.

Mrs. Palliser looked very doubtful, while her husband hummed a tune and played with his watch-chain smilingly. Then the old lady, who often listened to the conversation around her without appearing to do so, remarked:

"I know that book. I read it several years ago."

"You, grandmother!" exclaimed Gerard, with more animation than he had shown before. "Well, what do you think of it?"

"I think the literature is very good, but the dogma very bad, my dear," said the old lady, folding her hands upon her lap.

"Oh, mother, why didn't you let *me* say that?" cried Mr. Palliser, laughing in serio-comic admiration at his mother's somewhat epigrammatic utterance.

"Never mind, my dear; you'll say it some day, no doubt," replied the old lady, mighty dryly.

Gerard sniggered, but his father felt a little aggrieved, thinking that his own generous compliment deserved a better return. Mrs. Palliser fell into a fit of musing, laughing somewhat absently at her husband's discomfiture and patting the ample gray curls on each side of her temples in a mechanical way that showed her thoughts were wandering. At last Gerard said, rather maliciously,

"Lancaster gave Mrs. Chattering a good setting-down this afternoon."

"Yes—*didn't* he!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, with a look of half-shocked amusement. "Poor woman, I *was* so sorry for her. However, I hope she won't bear malice. I must say I thought he got out of the difficulty very well."

"I like Lancaster," remarked her husband. "I thought he was going to prove one of your worthy young men—and I can't bear worthy young men. There's an appearance of strength about him that pleases me, somehow. He's the sort of man who knows his own mind, I should think, and isn't to be put out of his way without knowing the reason why."

"Yes, I dare say," said Mrs. Palliser. "But I do wish he hadn't said all that about mind-curing, or will-curing, or whatever it was. I'm old-fashioned, and stick to what I've been accustomed to, and

all this new talk upsets me. It's just as though people were trying to work miracles again, when the age of miracles is past. It isn't nice, somehow. I always think that a man who goes in for that sort of thing must be a bit of a quack; or if he isn't a quack he's something worse."

"And what do you consider worse than quackery?" asked Gerard, with a grave air.

"Well, my dear," returned his mother, in the peremptory tone she often adopted when standing on the defensive, "if you want to know I'll tell you; though you're such a shocking little sceptic I know you'll only laugh at me. I mean witchcraft—there! I don't like all this prying into mysteries and pretending to these wonderful powers; there's something sinful about it, and I object to the whole thing on principle."

"You must have got all that from Grant, my dear," said Mr. Palliser, with a twinkle in his eye. "You seemed quite interested in the subject before the Church condemned it by the mouth of the worthy rector this afternoon. That's what I've always said—the world is governed by women, and women are governed by parsons. That's why we're all so virtuous; eh, mother?"

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the old lady, briskly. "Your own virtues, at any rate, could scarcely be otherwise accounted for."

"It's all very well to laugh, Marmaduke," said his wife; "but you just mark my words. As sure as you're sitting there, if there is anything in these wonders that people talk about, evil will come of it. I believe we shall have a new set of diseases springing up as the result of it all, and then we shall be overrun with quacks professing to cure them, and a pretty state we shall all be in. I've no faith in it whatever, and I shall set my face against it steadfastly."

"There was once a man," observed Gerard, in his preoccupied way, "who objected to the introduction of street-lamps in his village on the ground that the lamps would bring policemen and the policemen would bring thieves. Don't you think he was a very short-sighted individual?"

"I don't know what you mean, my dear," retorted his mother, rather sharply.

"Well, is Lancaster doing Mirabel any good?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"Beyond question," replied Gerard. "He has gained a great deal of strength lately, and looks ever so much better than before."

"But he can't recover, Gerard, can he?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser.

"I can't possibly say," he returned. "I suppose Lancaster has his own opinion about it, but he hasn't confided it to me."

"Ah, I'm afraid there's no hope," said Mrs. Palliser, despairingly.

"I wonder whether he's really fond of that wife of his! I can't imagine how he can like her; and in that case I should think he would almost be glad to die and get away from her. I know *I* should be. But then if he did, you know, she'd probably get hold of somebody else; so perhaps it's better that he should live, after all."

"Even the unexpected doesn't always happen," said Gerard, sentimentously. "But I dare say if I represent the matter properly to Mirabel he'll see it in the same light, and make his arrangements accordingly."

Mrs. Palliser emitted a shriek of reprobation, and then broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. Gerard had preserved a placid front as long as his mother confined herself to uncomplimentary remarks about Madame Mirabel, which, indeed, rather amused him than otherwise; but her last insinuation cut him sharply. Somebody else? Who would that somebody be? Then all that was true and good and loyal in him rose in revolt against such unworthy thoughts, and, with a fervent wish that Mirabel might live for half a century to come, he strolled back to the house and read *The Scholar Gypsy* till it was time to dress for dinner.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO TRIPS TO TOWN

DURING his early years, while his father was still alive, Mr. Palliser had had a brief and uneventful career as a man of business in the City. At that time he was tolerably energetic, fond of bustle and variety, and by no means deficient in commercial aptitude; though of real judgment and common business shrewdness he never possessed a grain, and the wisest thing he ever did in his life was to sell out as soon as his father died and retire from the City altogether. From the age of eight-and-twenty, therefore, he had been a gentleman at large; but still the City exercised a certain fascination over him, and there were few things he enjoyed more than a stroll through Lombard Street or down "the Lane," surrounded by the cheerful incessant din of City life—the clerks and the messengers hurrying to and fro, the well-dressed, impetuous brokers rushing hither and thither, the little knots of solid merchants in their bright hats and white linen and black satin scarfs chattering at the corners of the street, the rattling hansoms, the lumbering gigantic drays, and the thousand-and-one other features of the great E. C. postal-district. Mr. Palliser moved through the busy streets with the complacent air of a man who could afford to enjoy the excitement and exhilaration of the scene without either pecuniary risk or the constraints incident to personal participation in commercial enterprise; his good father had borne all such burdens for him, years ago; and it was with a smile of more than usual benevolence that Mr. Palliser nodded to this man, waved his hand airily to that, and exchanged greetings with a third, thinking all the time how old and worn they had grown since he had last seen them, and wondering whether the City was as pleasant a place to them as it was to him.

Thus it fell out, a few weeks after the events of the last chapter, that Mr. Palliser made an excuse for a trip to Lothbury; the pretext being that he wanted to see his stock-broker. He had heard nothing further about the great company in which he had invested

so many hopes—and pounds—and it occurred to him that the advice of a solid business man on whose judgment he could rely might really be worth asking. To most people this very prudent impulse would have come first of all; but Mr. Palliser, as we know, was apt to be precipitate; and now, having parted with his money, he deemed it a remarkably shrewd and business-like thing to consult his stock-broker upon the character and prospects of the investment.

It was therefore in a benignant frame of mind that the good gentleman crossed Waterloo Bridge one fine sunshiny morning—a morning on which it was difficult to realize the fact that sometimes fogs of impenetrable blackness and insufferable stench pervaded the cheerful streets, that east winds and drenching rain cut one's face like iced razors, and that the pavement was slippery with the foulest slush and grease. Mr. Palliser always avoided London on such days, and seldom saw it except under its brightest and most attractive aspects. He looked particularly bright himself, in a smartly-cut blue coat and well-brushed hat, his curly gray hair ruffled every now and then by the river breeze, and his portly form erect, well-knit, and handsomely proportioned. As he strolled up Wellington Street, he looked in at the shop-windows, with all the interest of a person to whom such exhibitions had the charm of novelty; stopped a minute or two before the office of the *British Pedagogue*, and read the contents-bill of that sagacious weekly with an indulgent smile; then turned up the Strand, and so made his way at a leisurely pace along Fleet Street and Cheapside to the Bank. It was now nearly twelve o'clock, and Mr. Palliser calculated that he would have ample time for a friendly chat with the stock-broker before going for a plate of soup to Birch's, as was his custom in the middle of the day when in the City.

"Well, Mr. Palliser, and what's the best news with you?" inquired the man of business cheerily, as they shook hands. "One doesn't often see you here—lucky man, lucky man. But come, sit down. What is it to-day—Mexican Rails? Brighton A's? Central Argentines? Money's awfully tight, I must tell you, and things are looking queer. Let me see—you hold some Provincial Cédulas, don't you? There's a bit of a spurt on just now in South American securities, and if you're a seller now's your time."

Mr. Palliser, comfortably seated in a capacious leather arm-chair, smiled and shook his head knowingly. "Ah, I dare say," he said, with the air of a man accustomed to that sort of solicitation. "We

know all about it, don't we? No—I came up to-day just to see if you could get me a little information, Riley, about that new company, you know; that thing that Jerningham's got in hand. When is it going to be floated?"

Mr. Riley's manner changed at once. "Jerningham?" he repeated, with a perplexed frown. "You don't mean that Anti-In-toxicant whatever-he-calls-it, do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Mr. Palliser.

"Floated!" resumed the other. "I don't suppose it will ever be floated. Much more likely to be liquidated, I should think. But why? You don't mean to say you're nibbling at a thing like that, do you?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Mr. Palliser, looking vastly important. "Look at the promoters—they're influential enough, I should say. Men like that don't take up rotten things. Why, Rothschild himself said there was a fortune in it. I believe they're helping to finance it. A man told me the other day—"

"Pooh, pooh, my dear sir," interrupted Riley. "Rothschild, indeed—you might as well talk about Rothschild financing Mother What's-her-name's Soothing Syrup, or the latest Universal Pill. As for the promoters, I simply don't believe in 'em. Jerningham tells you this man's on it, and that man, and the other man—just see if he dares to print their names on the prospectus. No, no, Palliser, take my advice and have nothing to do with it. I can put you in for some better things than that."

"H'm," muttered Mr. Palliser, becoming rather grave. "Ah, well—so you don't think much of it, I see. I suppose that in that case it's not likely there'll be much market for the shares. Well, I must think about what's to be done. It's monstrous strange, though. But if the company were once floated, I suppose there'd be a quotation; and if so—"

"I do believe you're in it already!" exclaimed the old stock-broker, with a threatening look.

"A mere trifle," replied the other, with a guilty air which he strove vainly to conceal. "Nothing to make or mar. Only—"

"Well, you've outdone yourself this time, Palliser," said Mr. Riley, throwing himself back in his chair. "How often have I entreated you never to do anything of this sort without my advice? Jerningham, too—to think that an exposed swindler like that can have got round you so easily! It's beyond everything. How much did he get out of you?"

"Get out of me!" echoed Mr. Palliser, rather indignantly. "I took five hundred pounds' worth of stock. If it turns up trumps, well and good; if not—"

"Ay, if not; what then?" asked the stock-broker, as his client paused. "Have you any idea what your liability is likely to be?"

Mr. Palliser said no—not the faintest; and very uncomfortable he began to feel. The stock-broker, determined to give him a lesson, pursued his advantage mercilessly.

"No, I dare say you haven't. Why, you're entirely in that man's hands; and if he brings out this precious company of his with your name on the list of original share-holders, it may go rather hard with you. The best advice I can give you is to sell out to the first jobber who gives you a chance. If he doesn't float it after all, of course you'll be safe enough; only you'll have paid five hundred pounds for the advantage, and I think myself it's just a trifle dear at the price, seeing that you had it for nothing at all in the first instance."

Mr. Palliser felt like a school-boy in disgrace, and was heartily glad that neither his wife, nor his mother, nor his son was there to see him punished. He now began to get exceedingly uneasy. "Look here, Riley," he said at last, "I dare say I was a trifle precipitate about the business; but there were other considerations that influenced me—I didn't look upon it as an ordinary investment. What do you really know about it? That's the question. If you can give me any trustworthy information on the subject I should really be very grateful to you. Is there no chance of its succeeding, do you think?"

Mr. Riley's face relaxed a little. "Well, Palliser," he said, "I don't know much more about it than what I have told you; but if you want my private opinion—which may be worth nothing at all, mind you—I don't think you'll be ruined this time. Your five hundred pounds you had better look upon as gone. Jerningham will never be able to float the concern at all—that's *my* belief; he's got your hundreds and probably a good many more, and if you ever manage to get any back I shall say you're a particularly clever man. I may be wrong, of course. The thing may be floated, it may even have a bit of a boom, and then you'll be able to sell your shares; but I have very serious doubts about it myself. Mean-time, however, there's nothing to be done but wait."

This was not very reassuring, but it was evident that Mr. Riley

was in no mood to give him greater comfort, and Mr. Palliser was fain to be content. But the enormous fortune—the thousands of pounds a year—the eradication of drunkenness from the whole civilized world—the colossal operations—ah, where were all these now? Vanished like the lingering memories of a dream; and five hundred pounds in hard gold had probably vanished with them.

Well, there was no use in fretting, after all, and Mr. Palliser, on taking leave of his Mentor, bent his steps in the direction of the Royal Exchange. A plate of soup and a gill of sherry would probably induce brighter views of the share-market, not to say of life in general; for he was of a cheerful disposition withal, and had been known to extract enjoyment from even more serious troubles than this one. It was pleasanter, of course, to boast of exploits, adventures, and good-luck; but there was still a degree of satisfaction to be derived from boasting of crosses and misfortunes, so long as he was the hero of them, and they were of a sufficiently startling nature to make an exciting story; while such a hair's-breadth escape as he was now hoping for was almost as good as either. Accordingly he made a comfortable meal, gave a waiter a liberal tip, and, feeling considerably more cheerful than before, turned up Finch Lane; then he sauntered up and down Lombard Street, watching the busy men as they popped in and out of the great banking-houses; and finally found himself in King William Street. He had just faced in the direction of the statue, and was walking slowly along the pavement, when the swinging-doors of one of the Life Assurance offices opened, and a lady came quickly out. He was unable to see her features, for she had her veil down, and began to walk in the same direction as himself a few yards in front of him; but there was something strangely familiar to him in her gait and figure. For a moment he was at a loss to know who she was. Then he suddenly remembered, and, in a dozen rapid steps, was by her side.

"Mr. Palliser!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "The very last person I should have expected to meet. You're not a City man, are you?"

"Only now and then, when the humor takes me," replied Mr. Palliser, smiling. "Yet surely it is more curious for you to be here than for me. Are you alone? Can I escort you anywhere—even if it's only over the terrible crossing here?"

"No, indeed, thank you," replied Madame Mirabel, recovering herself. "It is indeed a dreadful crossing—one of the very worst

in London. But I won't take you out of your way. I'm only waiting for an omnibus."

"Let me see you into it, at any rate," urged Mr. Palliser in his most paternal way. "Ah—here's a chance, I think—there are no more vehicles coming just now. We must be quick, though. Look out for that hansom! That was a narrow shave. Why, Madame Mirabel, you're more at home in crushes of this sort than I am myself, I declare. I know very few ladies who could take a crossing in your—what shall I call it?—sportsmanlike style."

"Oh, I never hurry myself," said Madame Mirabel coolly, though she was inwardly fuming at having been overtaken by the good, garrulous gentleman. "If once you lose your head and go flying about hither and thither you're sure to be knocked down. However, here we are, and now let me beg of you to go back."

"But why should I, my dear lady?" asked Mr. Palliser. "My time's my own; I really must insist on seeing you safe into your omnibus, at least. Does it start from here? Where are you going to?"

Madame Mirabel colored with vexation, and murmured something about the neighborhood of Stockwell.

"Oh well, we'll soon get an omnibus," remarked Mr. Palliser. "They start just over there. Won't you take my arm? It's safer in the crowd, I think. You've a good way to go before you get back to Haslemere."

"It is rather far," replied Madame Mirabel, with an effort.

"However, the days are pretty long now," continued her escort, who found it as much as he could do to keep pace with her. "I am sorry you'll be so late; I should have been charmed to travel down with you. As it is, I shall catch a rather earlier train, no doubt."

"You shall not go another step out of your way," said Madame Mirabel, suddenly stopping short. "Thanks ever so much for your assistance, but really I do not need it. Good-bye;" and she held out her hand with so decided a gesture of dismissal that Mr. Palliser felt it impossible to press his company upon her further. He therefore took his leave with a grand sweep of his hat, and politely though very reluctantly turned back; while Madame Mirabel, set free, quickened her steps considerably, and was soon lost amid a throng of omnibuses.

"Now I wonder what that young woman's up to?" soliloquized the good gentleman, as he tramped westward again. "She can

scarcely have been insuring her husband's life, I should think. Stockwell, too—whatever can she want to do at Stockwell?"

"An unfortunate meeting and a desperate escape," thought Madame Mirabel, as she stepped into her omnibus; for she was a careful woman, and never spent money on cabs. "I suppose now that that very excellent old person is wondering why I'm going to Stockwell, and within the next four-and-twenty hours the majority of his neighbors will be wondering why too. The amusing part of it is that they will—*never—know.*"

The idea seemed to entertain her, for she smiled a little as she took her seat. The omnibus jolted on again, and then, for want of better idleness, she began observing her fellow-passengers—that never-failing source of interest to the student of human nature. There was the usual stout woman with a big bundle and a red face, who looks suspiciously at everybody else; the pale, shabby girl in a frayed jacket—pathetically respectable, possibly hungry, belonging to that half of the world of whose means of existence the other half is said to be so ignorant; the sharp-looking junior clerk or errand-boy, with a black leather case of papers strapped across his chest and the last new ditty from the music-halls lurking in ambush behind his teeth; the middle-aged lady who sets the fashion in Balls Pond or Hackney Wick, easily distinguishable by her fine color, smart bonnet, showy inexpensive 'silk,' and doubtful finger-nails; the spare, meek man, whose corpulent umbrella is so apt to get in other people's way, and whose necktie always will ruck up behind; the woman with two children and a baby, of whom we will not now speak more particularly; the two young female persons who discuss family matters at the top of their voices, and look round every now and then to see what effect they are creating; the good-natured man, who makes friendly remarks to no one in particular, only to find them received in stony silence—all these types were represented in that Stockwell omnibus, and passed under the keen, contemptuous criticism of Madame Mirabel. How irredeemably vulgar and tawdry and commonplace they were! how grotesquely mean! what clumsy workmanship they represented, and what coarse material had been used in the manufacture of them! And yet with regard to honesty, sobriety, and industry, homely domestic virtues and humdrum worth, as exemplified in a general struggle to pay their way and an unconscious habit of kindness to their children and their neighbors, it is possible that these pawns of society were entitled to a

somewhat higher valuation; only Madame Mirabel had never made a study of such characteristics, and did not pretend to feel any interest in their exercise.

At last, having signalled to the conductor, she alighted at the corner of a rather squalid street, lined with the poorest sort of shops. Proceeding along this for nearly a quarter of a mile, she took a turning to the right, finding herself in a broad, quiet, ill-kept thoroughfare occupied by small houses of a singularly mean appearance. They were low and narrow; the paint was peeling off most of the doors, and it was evidently a long time since any of the windows had been cleaned. About a dozen weedy-looking saplings stood forlornly on either side of the roadway, giving the place rather the look of an abortive boulevard, and the only sign of life consisted of a rakish-looking butcher's-boy, who was delivering a couple of mutton-chops at one of the houses aforesaid. And yet the inhabitants of this depressing spot considered themselves, and with some justice, the aristocracy of the neighborhood. The street itself bore the grand, if somewhat misleading, appellation of Royalty Park; and at the farther end of it there was a row of tenements, slightly higher than the others, called Augusta-Victoria Villas. Here lived the *élite*, between whom and the dwellers in the other part of the Park yawned a gulf of social distinction almost as broad as that which separated the latter from the denizens of outer barbarism round the corner.

To Augusta-Victoria Villas Madame Mirabel now bent her steps, and rang the bell at No. 3. After an interval, a sound of shuffling footsteps was audible inside, and the door was opened by a very small and extremely sluttish servant-girl.

"Is Mrs. Jickling at home?" demanded Madame Mirabel.

"What might ye want, m'm?" replied the sluttish servant-girl, suspiciously.

Madame Mirabel pushed the door farther open, and, without another word, walked past the girl into the house. A slight stir was heard in one of the back rooms, and the next moment a tall, thin, poorly-dressed and untidy-looking elderly woman came out into the passage.

"Why, it's Julia, as I live!" exclaimed this lady, in a tone of querulous surprise. "Whatever have brought you up here, all of a sudden now, I wonder?"

"How do you do, mother," said Madame Mirabel, as they entered the room together. "Yes, it's not often I get the chance of

coming. I can't stay very long either, for I must get back if possible before dark."

"Well, I must say you're looking bravely," remarked the mother. "Sit down, my dear, and take off your bonnet. You've not lost any of your good looks, Julia, and you always had a pretty taste in dress, though a bit too dowdy for my thinkin'. Well, your father was a gentleman—come of a fine old family, he did—and I was always considered genteel myself when I was in society. Yes, you feature your father, my dear—you've got his eyes, and his fine manners too."

She was a strange-looking old woman, this mother of Madame Mirabel's—with a thin, wrinkled face, a pair of eager, shifty eyes, and a querulous mouth, denoting a mean and somewhat grasping nature. Every now and then she would assert her dignity and superior breeding in ways that were pitiful enough, and wear her threadbare gowns with the stateliness of a Roman dowager; but the next moment the envious spirit would assert itself, and the Fates in power come in for perhaps more than their due share of vituperation. Just now she fell into her most patrician mood.

"And have you been very gay lately?" continued Mrs. Jickling with her grandest air. "Balls and operas every night, I suppose—I know what a whirl it is. And which is the favorite theatre this year? I suppose you have seen that new piece at the Haymarket. The papers are full of it. Of course you've been to the Academy. Ah, it's many a year since I saw anything of the great world—you young folks must be havin' a fine time of it, no doubt."

"Don't talk such stuff, mother," said Madame Mirabel, rather brusquely. "You know perfectly well we live an hour from London, and there's no opera in Hampshire that I ever heard of. You're not worse off than I am as far as gayety is concerned. Have you been out to-day?"

"I walked a little in the park this morning," replied Mrs. Jickling, indifferently.

"The park! What park?" inquired Madame Mirabel, opening her eyes.

"The park—Royalty Park," answered Mrs. Jickling, waving her hand in the direction of the dusty road outside. "Of course you pretend not to know where your own mother lives," she added, with an aggrieved sniff. "I don't say you've done bad by me, Julia, though there is some daughters p'r'aps as might like to see more o' their mothers—I can't say, I'm sure; but kin is kin

whether or no, and I don't see what call you have to sneer at the mother as bore you and is living in poverty all alone, for all you've gone and married a grand man."

"A grand man!" repeated Madame Mirabel with a disdainful smile. "Poor Gaston—I don't think there's anything very grand about a Legation doctor, is there?"

"Belongin' to one of the oldest families in France, and got a competency of 'is own," retorted Mrs. Jickling. "I've 'eard it from your own lips, Julia, many's the time. Not a bad match, my dear, for a poor governess 'way off in the East. How is the doctor, by the way? You did write me that he was better some time ago."

"Much the same," said Madame Mirabel, briefly. "He is stronger than he was, but it would be rash to count on his recovery."

"Ah," commented the old woman, looking keenly at her daughter. "Well, you'll be comfortably provided for, I suppose, whatever happens. Some folks is born lucky. You've not done so bad, Julia, after all, though it's a pity 'twasn't the other one you told me of—that Englishman, you know; I always thought you 'ad more of a fancy for him—and then to let him slip through your fingers that way! Well, it's poor work worryin' over what can't be helped, but you've got your life before you, and *if*—"

"I should like a cup of tea, mother," interrupted Madame Mirabel.

Mrs. Jickling rose with a most elaborate air of offended dignity, opened the door, and called out to the sluttish servant-girl. Then she resumed her seat, and preserved a lofty silence till the tea appeared. Madame Mirabel, nothing disconcerted by her mother's frosty looks, made a few remarks upon indifferent subjects, and then, when the elder lady showed signs of thawing, opened the real object of her visit.

"Yes, I've no doubt it's dull for you here," she said, putting down her cup. "I suppose there are very few of the people fit to associate with."

Mrs. Jickling replied only with a tragically scornful gesture, intending to intimate thereby that the intellectual and social inferiority of her neighbors was beyond words.

"Ah, I dare say," said Madame Mirabel, with an air of sympathy. "Things were different with you once—but that's a long time ago. I wonder you don't prefer some pretty place out of

town. You might have more society there, and it would be quite as cheap."

"The country is not to my taste," replied Mrs. Jickling, loftily.

"Of course, if you *prefer* this sort of thing, there's no more to be said," remarked Madame Mirabel. "Still, an occasional change is desirable. I should think you found London very hot and dusty at this time of year, and it has occurred to me once or twice lately that a short sea-trip somewhere, perhaps—"

"I should 'a thought you'd 'a known your own mother better, Julia," exclaimed Mrs. Jickling, somewhat indignantly. "Do I look like a person to go gadding on a steamboat to Margate, or Sheerness, or any such low place? A short sea-trip, indeed—no, thank *you*, my dear; I may be poor and I may be shabby, but I'm not one to go pushing about among a crowd o' common folk eatin' oranges and jam puffs all over the deck, and disgusting well-bred persons with their coarse jokes. Give me my own privacy, where I can keep myself *to* myself, and see no more of the world than I want to. Not as a change mightn't do me good, as you say, but when one's means is straitened one hasn't much choice of places, and unless I can travel as a lady should, I'd rather by half stay where I am forever."

"Quite so," assented her daughter. "But it needn't be either Margate or Sheerness. How should you like ten days or a fortnight at Lucerne?"

"What's that?" said the old woman sharply, dropping her affectations with ludicrous promptitude. "D'ye mean it—really?"

"I mean that if you would care to go I am willing to provide the funds," replied Madame Mirabel. "For twenty pounds you'll be able to travel second-class there and back, and stay at some comfortable *pension* on the lake—of course I can't afford to send you to the Schweitzerhof. It'll be a change for you, and probably will do you good."

"Well, you are a good daughter, I'll say that for you, Julia," exclaimed poor Mrs. Jickling, delighted at the splendor of this prospect. "Switzerland—to think of it! And after months in this low neighborhood, too; it'll be a real treat, my dear. Let me give you another cup o' tea—do, now. I've never been to Lucerne, and they do say as it's a lovely place."

"I'm glad you like the idea," said Madame Mirabel.

"And what made you think of it, now?" continued Mrs. Jickling. "What put it into your head?"—with an incipient touch

of suspicion in her voice. "You don't know anybody as lives at Lucerne, do ye?"

"Nobody," replied Madame Mirabel. "Why?"

"H'm," sniffed Mrs. Jickling, still more dubiously. "And it must be Lucerne, must it? S'pose I preferred Geneva, now, or Heidelberg, or some nice place on the Rhine? I s'pose that 'd do as well, wouldn't it?"

"No," said her daughter, "it wouldn't. It must be Lucerne, and Lucerne only. You must give me your word for that, mother."

"You're up to something, Julia," said the old woman, with a very cunning look. "Let's waste no words. What is it? Come!"

"I wish you to do something for me at Lucerne," replied Madame Mirabel, calmly. "It really doesn't matter whether you stay there all the time or not, because the thing itself won't take you five minutes; so if you choose you can stay at Gersau, or Weggis, or anywhere else on the lake. But the business must be transacted in Lucerne, and the best plan will be for you to do it a day or two before you leave on your return journey."

Mrs. Jickling's face was a study. Excitement, curiosity, and misgiving struggled within her for the mastery, and her eyes gleamed. "You're a sharp girl, Julia," she said at last. "I suppose it's nothing very difficult, is it?"

"A child could do it," replied Madame Mirabel.

"Nor dangerous?"

"Not in the very least."

"What is it?" breathed the mother, whispering.

Madame Mirabel took out her porte-monnaie, and laid four new five-pound notes upon the table. "Those are for your expenses," she said, in measured tones. "This," holding up a sealed envelope, "contains your instructions. You had better not open it till you get to your destination, if your curiosity can hold out so long. When can you start?"

"Whenever you like," was the prompt reply.

"Good; any day this month will do," assented Madame Mirabel. "There's no more to say, I think. Better put up that money. Is that clock of yours right?"

"It's five minutes slow, my dear, and that's the truth," replied Mrs. Jickling with unwonted candor. "But you ain't in any hurry, are you?"

"I've nothing more to stay for, and a long way to go," said Madame Mirabel, rising. "Good-bye, mother; you needn't write

to me unless you choose—or, on second thoughts, you had better not write at all. Remember, now—*don't* write. I shall not be anxious." And then she went away without more ado.

That night the little servant-girl at No. 3 was almost crushed out of existence by the tremendous affability of Mrs. Jickling, who informed her that she was about to travel for a change in foreign parts. Old Miss Twistleton, the occupant of No. 4, was similarly overpowered by an intimation to the same effect, and readily promised to keep the key of the deserted mansion during the absence of its owner, looking in every now and then to see that all was safe. To this lady, whom it pleased Mrs. Jickling to regard as a humble friend, she was unable to resist the temptation of hinting at important business which she could only transact in person; accompanying the statement with so many mysterious nods, and frowns, and winks, that the poor little spinster got half beside herself with curiosity, and looked up to Mrs. Jickling as more of a personage than ever. At that point, however, Mrs. Jickling was prudent enough to stop. Her chief weakness was an overweening sense of her social superiority, accentuated by the keenest dissatisfaction with the meanness of her actual circumstances; but she was far too quick-witted to let this foible get the mastery over her, especially in cases where a little intrigue or subtlety was likely to produce results to her own advantage.

When Madame Mirabel arrived at Haslemere Station that evening, Gerard, who had been spending part of the afternoon with her husband, was there to meet her. She returned his glance with a bright, almost a tender, smile, and let him take her hand to help her out of the carriage. The walk home with her, along the quiet, undulating, country road, was dangerously delightful to the youth. She owned to having had a fatiguing day, and took his arm—leaning on it, up some of the steeper slopes, somewhat heavily; and once, when Gerard laid his hand on hers as it rested there—so white, so soft, so shapely—she did not rebuke him for the freedom as she might have done, but seemed unconscious of it, until the hot, mad pressure of his fingers and the electric thrill which, agitating his nerves, and causing his heart to beat almost audibly with the impetuous rushing of the blood through his veins, awakened that within her which served her instead of a conscience. Then she very gently, very quietly, put an end to it. She began to tell him how she had been to see her mother that afternoon—an elderly lady in feeble health, who lived the life of a recluse; how ami-

able and uncomplaining she was, in spite of her many sufferings; how they talked together about poor Gaston, and his new hopes of life; and how kind Mr. Palliser had been when, on her way to her mother's, they had come across each other in the City. Gerard had never felt more utterly humiliated than when the conversation took this turn. The reproof was so delicate, so exquisitely pointed, so gentle and yet so unmistakable, that his self-loathing for that one moment of insanity overcame all other considerations, and he thought he could have worshipped the woman who had so borne herself with something of religious reverence. They parted at her gate, and he went home alone—more hopelessly in love with Madame Mirabel than ever.

CHAPTER IX

THE JUMPS INN

MADAME MIRABEL need not have been apprehensive lest the fact of her journey to Stockwell should become public property. Mr. Palliser was not a gossip, and though he mentioned his meeting with her to his wife, in the most natural way possible, neither took sufficient interest in it to make it the subject of conversation outside. It was only when Gerard mentioned, at breakfast the next morning, that she had been to see her aged mother, that the trifling incident made any impression on their minds; his father being rather pleased at so unexpected a display of filial piety, and Mrs. Palliser thinking how strange it was that she should have a mother living in so queer a neighborhood.

A few days afterwards, Dr. Lancaster, driving in his light, well-appointed chaise, overtook Gerard on the Portsmouth Road. The two had become great friends. Lancaster was too shrewd a man not to see through the slight surface-priggishness of the youth's demeanor and recognize the sterling qualities which underlay it; while Gerard, self-disdainful in his better moments for his occasional fits of jealousy, found relief in treating the doctor in his most courteous manner, and displaying that true appreciation of Lancaster's high qualities which it was impossible for him to withhold.

"Will you drive with me to Churt, Palliser?" cried the doctor, pulling up.

"Yes, gladly," replied the other.

"Up with you, then," said Lancaster, "I've a patient to see there, but it won't take me long, and then I want to go as far as the Devil's Jumps."

"Haven't you been to the Jumps yet?" asked Gerard, as they started off again.

"Never," answered Lancaster. "I've wanted to a long time, but somehow I've never had an opportunity. There's a curious old inn, too, I'm told. I suppose you're familiar with it all."

"Rather," said Gerard, smiling. "Are you fond of high art?"

"High art?" repeated Lancaster. "No—yes—I don't know, I'm sure. Why?"

"Only because there are some very remarkable specimens to be seen there," replied Gerard. "I'm surprised you've never heard of the celebrated Jumps Inn picture-gallery. There's a treat in store for you, that's all."

They went along at a spanking pace, chatting upon indifferent topics, and soon arrived at the straggling village which was their first destination. Dr. Lancaster alighted at a small brick cottage, and disappeared; Gerard of course waiting for him outside. In about a quarter of an hour he came out again, mounted to his seat, and gathered up the reins, with a curious expression on his face.

"A queer case that," he said, nodding in the direction of the cottage, as they drove off.

"What is it?" inquired Gerard.

"A girl of sixteen or seventeen years of age, who has taken it into her head that she can't move. To all appearance she's as well as you or I; yet there she lies, day after day, helplessly in bed, and says she has lost all power in her legs. It's about a fortnight since I first saw her, and of course I had to examine her rather closely. Her legs seemed all right—as plump and muscular as one could wish. But nothing could induce her to make the slightest effort, and to-day I notice a slight, but quite unmistakable, shrinking in the tissues. Her mother swears that she's bewitched."

"And there are no other symptoms whatever?" asked Gerard.

"Absolutely none," replied the doctor. "According to the girl's account the whole thing came on in the night. She went to bed as well as usual, and woke up just before daybreak with a queer sensation, she says—feeling as though she ended at her waist, and had no legs at all. And there she's been ever since. Funny, isn't it?"

"It must be paralysis," said Gerard.

"Not true paralysis," said the doctor, shaking his head. "I mean, it's not the ordinary paralysis which results from injury to the vertebral column, or pressure on the brain, or any such well-known cause as that. No, I'm inclined to think that it's more like a case of hysteria, which as I dare say you know takes very various forms. One often meets with morbid affections of this sort among women, and it's not so uncommon as you might think among growing girls. The trouble with this one is that she won't

make an effort because, as she says, she knows she can't. It's her mental state that baffles me. She's firmly and absolutely convinced that she *can't* move, and nothing I can say will persuade her that she can if she tries. That's the real trouble. There's not the smallest reason, physically, why she shouldn't get up this moment. If I could only get her to believe that, I believe I could cure her at once. She wants faith—and there's the affair in a nutshell."

"Do you believe in faith-healing, then?" asked Gerard, smiling.

"In such a case as this I certainly do," replied Lancaster. "Let that girl only become intellectually convinced that what I tell her is *true*, and she'll pick herself up as quickly as the paralytic in the New Testament. The fact is, the body must be acted upon by the mind. Just now it is this girl's mind that, being full of one obstinate and ineradicable conviction, keeps her body in thrall. Once shake that conviction, and replace it by a belief that she is wrong and I am right—in a word, give her *faith*—and you'd at once see the result. The mind would still control the body, but its incidence, so to speak, being set in another direction, the action of it upon the body would effect an immediate cure."

"How jolly it would be if all diseases were amenable to such simple treatment," said Gerard, with a laugh.

"I am sure that a considerable proportion would be, if only the experiment could be fairly tried," answered Lancaster. "Not all, of course. But even then the difficulty would be to produce the necessary conditions—to arouse the implicit faith on which the whole treatment hinges. If only that difficulty could be overcome we should see something. 'According to your faith be it unto you'—speaking purely as a pathologist I believe that that and similar expressions contain a very deep philosophical truth. Some day, no doubt, all this will be placed upon a sound scientific basis; though whether you and I will live to see it is a different question altogether."

They drove on for a short time in silence, the doctor wrapped in thought. At last he said:

"There's that case of our friend Mirabel, again. I wouldn't say anything about it to other people, but you're as intimate there as I am. Of course you've noticed how much he has improved of late?"

"Yes, I have indeed," replied Gerard.

"Well, there's some influence there that I can only guess at," continued Lancaster. "I've not got to the bottom of it yet, but

I'm feeling my way, I think. I've a theory in my head about it that I'm trying to verify; and if I succeed I think I shall have made a very important discovery. The fact is— Hollo! what curious-looking hills those are over there!"

"Those are the Jumps," said Gerard, looking round.

It was a curious sight, certainly. From the sunny, fertile, luxuriant plain rose three or four abrupt pyramidal hillocks, covered with vegetation and rich grass, and, on the crown of the largest, a picturesque old cottage. They stood out, bold and striking, from the surrounding landscape, an admirable view of them being obtained from the winding road. Dr. Lancaster looked at them with great interest.

"A very strange configuration," he said, as he slackened pace. "I wonder what the origin of it can have been. I suppose there's some legend or other, isn't there?"

"Some absurd story about the devil having jumped from one to the other," replied Gerard. "Here's the inn—you can hear all about it there. It's a pretty place, isn't it?"

"Charming," assented the other, preparing to pull up. "So this is the Jumps Inn. Now then for a glass of ale and the picture-gallery—I'm curious to see those specimens of art you were telling me about."

They descended from the chaise, and entered the little room on the left of the door, where they were welcomed by a most delightful old lady with silver hair and silver spectacles, who won the doctor's heart at once. This was the hostess. The ale was soon forthcoming, and very pleasant they found the cool draught on that hot afternoon. In a few minutes Lancaster remarked:

"I hear you have quite a celebrated picture-gallery here, and I should very much like to see it. Are these the—er—pictures?"

His hesitation, as he looked wonderingly round the room, was not unnatural. He kept his countenance, however, admirably; and the good old dame beamed with gratified complacency as she rose briskly to the occasion and prepared to do the honors of her treasure-house to the two visitors.

It was certainly a wonderful collection—scarcely to be despised, indeed, by admirers of Botticelli and his congeners, but calculated to excite considerable bewilderment in the minds of less cultivated persons. The paralytic attitudes, the wooden faces, the misshapen limbs, the staring, imbecile expressions, which appear to have been characteristic of humanity in the days of the Old Masters, were all

reproduced with marvellous accuracy in the picture-gallery of the Jumps Inn, suggesting the deep reverence which must have actuated the painters for those most venerable models. This opinion was gravely expressed by Gerard, who asked Lancaster whether a certain interesting group of local murderers—two men and a woman, all of whom squinted rather painfully—did not remind him of a celebrated Cimabue in the National Gallery. Lancaster, I am sorry to say, only replied by a muttered reference to Mrs. Jarley's wax-works; at which Gerard seemed, not unnaturally, much hurt. The murder of the sailor on the Portsmouth Road, and the subsequent execution of the assassins, were also sympathetically treated; and the crack picture of the whole lot, for which a real live artist had offered no less than ten pounds down, was pronounced by both one of the greatest curiosities in art that they had ever seen. It was indeed no more than the truth when the visitors, in taking their departure, expressed the interest and pleasure they had derived from the exhibition, and promised to recommend all their friends to visit it without delay. The dear old lady was enraptured, and bestowed her most cordial courtesies upon them as they mounted their chariot once more and drove away.

"You were speaking of Mirabel," said Gerard, when they had gone some little distance.

"Ah! yes, I was," replied Lancaster. "I've got a theory about that case; only a theory, mind—so don't talk about it to anybody else. The fact is, I'm beginning to doubt whether his complaint is true consumption after all."

"How do you mean?" asked Gerard, surprised. "Is there such a thing as false consumption, then?"

"Nature is full of tricks," said Lancaster. "Her imitative powers are something wonderful, as anybody who has read Darwin and Wallace knows well enough. She seems to delight in cheating people with false appearances; and not only people, but animals, birds, and insects, too. Never trust to appearances; that's one lesson I'm beginning to learn. Let us go back to first principles. What is health, to start with? Roughly speaking, a condition in which the principle of life, or vitality, is flourishing unimpaired. Consequently ill-health implies a decrease in vitality. In all men's lives there is something tidal—an ebb and a flow, so to speak. When you feel thoroughly well and hearty, it means that your vitality is at flood tide; and when you ail, or fall into weakness and listlessness and irritability, or, *à fortiori*, develop symptoms of a still more

alarming character, you may know that the tide has turned and the ebb has begun to set in.

"Well, now," continued the doctor, whipping up his horse, "it is clear that when a man is born with an inherited tendency to gout, or tuberculosis, or heart-complaint, the vital principle has a harder battle to fight than it otherwise would have. The body it animates contains an unusually large number of maleficent bacilli, or germs of some other destructive agency, which have to be counteracted. In such cases, of course, it behooves the patient to be continually on his guard—to choose suitable climates and modes of life, to avoid improper diet, and in a word to array himself on the side of his vital principle in its struggle to keep down the antagonistic element he has in him. But there are cases in which no such inherited evil exists, and yet where the ebb and flow of vitality is so abnormally violent as to constitute a danger almost as great as the other. For years, perhaps, vitality is at the full, and the man is well and strong. Suddenly, and from no discoverable cause, the ebb sets in; vitality diminishes; and the effects are different in different cases, producing, in some, a marvellous *imitation* of some specific organic disease. Mirabel, for instance, when I first saw him, appeared to be suffering from acute tuberculosis. He had all the symptoms of it, externally at any rate. Yet when I examined him, and diagnosed the case, I failed to find the exact indications which ought to have been there. This puzzled me, though of course I said nothing about it. Now he is wonderfully better, and the symptoms themselves are rapidly disappearing. It is curious how a decrease of vitality will sometimes fix upon some particular organ, and produce all the appearance of a real specific disease. In Mirabel's case it seems to have affected the lungs. But now the tide has turned again, and if only we can keep up the flow of vitality which appears to have set in, he will I trust soon be as strong again as ever."

Gerard was so struck with astonishment that for some moments he did not speak. "Well," he said at last, "if this theory of yours is really true, it ought to revolutionize the whole of medicine. It provides a fresh starting-point for investigation. Have you said anything to his wife?"

"I've told her nothing that she didn't know before," returned Lancaster—"namely, that Mirabel was on the mend. But she seemed to have no idea of the amount of progress that had been made, and was surprised by what I said, though I didn't say nearly as much to her as I have said now to you."

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"I wish I could see rather more deeply into this theory of yours," resumed Gerard, after a pause.

"I can't see very deeply into it myself," said Lancaster. "As far as I am concerned it is a piece of the purest empiricism. But we have one solid fact to begin upon—the existence, in the world, of a universal Principle of Life. It is found everywhere and pervades everything—the cause of all phenomena, the main-spring of the entire world-machinery. What it is, or where it comes from, or how it works, no one knows. But it is universally manifested, and to its different manifestations in acting we give different names—I mean the names of all the forces we see in nature. Gravitation, cohesion, attraction, and the rest—these are all active principles, and the great principle which underlies them, and from which they spring is Life, and nothing else. In recent years our attention has been drawn to higher, finer, and altogether subtler manifestations of it that we call by such names as electricity, animal magnetism, galvanism, and the odic force—all of which we are now only beginning to understand. The actions and reactions between mind and matter form one branch of this investigation, and the influence of mind on mind—as unimpeachable a fact as that of matter upon matter—another equally important. One hears a great deal of nonsense talked nowadays about telepathy, brain-waves, and the like. The nonsense will soon evaporate, and the phenomena themselves, which are true phenomena, be placed upon a sound scientific basis. Bah! we know nothing—nothing. We are, scientifically speaking, still in the Neolithic Age. It will be for our descendants to discard the clumsy theories of to-day, and work with finer implements altogether."

"Then what it comes to is this—that in the whole of nature there is really only one force?" asked Gerard.

"Precisely; and that force is Life," replied the doctor. "All others are manifestations of it simply. Of course the unity of force is no new theory in itself. Faraday suspected it, only he put it rather cautiously. He confessed the opinion, almost amounting to a conviction, that the various forms under which the forces of nature are made manifest have one common origin; though to that original force he gave no name. I am rather more audacious, you see. I may be mistaken, but it is often our very mistakes which form the stepping-stones to the discovery of essential truths."

"I wonder what Madame Mirabel would say to all this," observed Gerard, with a smile,

"Oh, she half-believes I'm hypnotizing her husband," said Lancaster, laughing. "There's no one like your thorough-going materialist for taking up notions of that sort."

"Has Mirabel ever talked to you about *his* favorite theory?" asked Gerard.

"Often and often," replied Lancaster. "It's ingenious and plausible—very. Yes, we frequently have arguments on the subject. The trouble about it is that you can't verify it. Clifford, you may be sure, would have repudiated any such deduction from his mind-stuff hypothesis. Well, we shall know all about it one day, I suppose—all about that and many other things, no doubt."

"I wonder," said Gerard, in a musing tone, "whether if we did know all about it we should find life more worth living than it is now."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the doctor, briskly. "What business has a fellow of your age to talk like that? Of course life is worth living; or if it isn't it's one's own fault. I've no patience with such pessimistic views."

"And yet I've often wondered what I was born for," said Gerard, rather dejectedly. "I don't see that I'm any good in the world. Nobody can deny that suffering outweighs happiness; nobody knows what truth is; aspirations are formed only to be disappointed; crowds of people eager to work have work denied them, and are left to starve—the whole thing's a failure, as far as I can see."

"Just so; because you don't see far enough," replied the doctor.

"May be," said Gerard, briefly.

"All that sort of morbid discontent and cheap pessimism is very often the result of having nothing particular to do," continued Lancaster. "You're probably too well off; if you had to live on a shilling a day and earn it you might enjoy a healthier mental state. Of course we don't know what 'truth' is, as you say; but what of that? You remember what Lessing said—that if he were offered full knowledge of all the secrets of the universe with the right hand, and the opportunity of searching for them himself with the left, he'd choose the left. Complete fruition involves stagnation. I prefer things as they are, I must confess."

"You've been a prosperous man," Gerard ventured to observe.

"I've been a hard-working man, and it's been my salvation," retorted Lancaster. "I believe in the Gospel of Work. It's made

England what she is to-day. Oriental nations don't see this, of course; and the result is patent to everybody. Even the old Hebrews represented the necessity of labor as the primeval curse. Curse? Why, it's the greatest blessing the world has ever had. Don't you think that Adam must have been a much happier and more useful man when he had to take to agriculture for a livelihood, than when he was idling about a garden all day long?"

"But work won't prevent suffering," said Gerard.

"Palliser," said the doctor, after a pause, "I have had more suffering in my life than probably falls to the lot of most men; and had it not been for work—good, hard, honest work—it would have ruined me. But I gave myself no time for brooding. I rigorously and systematically put all painful thoughts out of my mind; I refused to think of them; I took refuge in study, in experiments, in writing, and in the practice of my profession; and at last I conquered them. It's a good thing to work so hard during the day that you fall asleep directly you get into bed, for it is then that the thought of sorrows and troubles is most likely to occur and harass you—as I once knew to my cost. And there is no better remedy for this than work—especially work which has for its object the relief of suffering in others."

Gerard made no reply. He was conscious of his constitutional failing—of that tendency to melancholy and sceptical pessimism against which he so often struggled, but which pressed so heavily upon him every now and then. He was now silenced but not convinced, though there was something about the cheerful philosophy of his companion that braced him in spite of himself. I am aware that youths constituted as Gerard was in this particular are apt to be put down as prigs—by those, at any rate, whose ideal of youthful excellence is the brawny, cricketing, drag-driving, rollicking person with a large appetite and a loud voice, the jovial philistine who has no nerves, and never "bothers his head" about anything; there, there, we are told, is the true type of a young Englishman. Perhaps! The type has its uses, beyond question. Hewers of wood and drawers of water there must be everywhere, and, to such, brains are a superfluity. We cannot all be thinkers, and thinkers cannot all be optimists. Gerard was by nature a thinker and a pessimist; he had not yet found the secret of true happiness, and was searching for it, perhaps, in not quite the right direction; but the germ of the thing was in him, and some day was to sprout forth luxuriantly.

Meanwhile they arrived at home again, and Gerard asked the doctor to come in and have some tea. Lancaster accepted cheerfully, and the two alighted together. They had no sooner entered the hall than Mrs. Palliser came hastily out of the drawing-room, with a terrified expression on her face.

"Dr. Lancaster," she said, advancing. "I'm more thankful to see you than I can tell. Will you come into the breakfast-room? Gerard, you come too. There's something dreadful the matter with your poor grandmother."

CHAPTER X

A LIGHT THAT FAILED

THE breakfast-room was a small, rather dingy apartment to the left of the front door, where Gerard was in the habit of sitting when he wished to read or write without fear of continual interruption. It contained but little in the way of furniture beyond a centre table, a few chairs, a rather old but still comfortable sofa, and a book-shelf; but it had the great merit of being isolated from all the other rooms in the house, and the windows opened upon a quiet corner of the grounds occupied by firs and shrubs. It was therefore only used as a breakfast-room during the winter, when it could be rendered warm and cheerful; in the summer Mrs. Palliser preferred the dining-room, which overlooked her sunny garden. A few moderately good engravings hung upon the walls, while on the table stood an old-fashioned double inkstand, flanked by a worn blotting-pad and a case of writing materials.

"I hope it's nothing serious?" said Dr. Lancaster, when they were all seated with the door safely shut.

"I don't know—I'm afraid it's very serious indeed," replied poor Mrs. Palliser, in undisguised distress. "The poor old lady has suddenly gone off her head!"

"Dear me," said the doctor, looking much concerned. "I'm very sorry to hear that. How did it come on?"

"It was just after lunch," replied Mrs. Palliser, unable to restrain her tears. "Of course she hasn't got up to breakfast for a long time past—she always takes her time in the morning. Well, we were sitting at the table—the servant had just begun to clear away, you know—when suddenly she turned to me and complained that the vases on the chimney-piece were making faces at her. I didn't understand her at first; I thought I hadn't heard properly. But she went on again in the strangest manner, saying that the one on the right had been winking at her most impertinently all lunch-time, and that the other—oh, I can't remember exactly, but something about horrible grimaces that terrified her.

I can't tell you the feeling of horror that came over me. My husband and I looked at each other in amazement, and I almost felt for a moment as if I were going mad myself."

"What did you do?" asked Dr. Lancaster.

"Well, my husband had more presence of mind than I had," said the poor lady, controlling herself with an effort. "He made some soothing reply, and removed the vases—you know those big Japanese ones we have in the dining-room; well, he put them somewhere out of sight, and she seemed a little relieved. Of course he was terribly alarmed. Then she began to talk again, partly to herself; and really I'm not quite sure whether she knew who we were, for she rambled terribly, and—and—she's been like that ever since," concluded Mrs. Palliser, breaking down afresh.

"You weren't at home, I suppose?" said Lancaster, turning to Gerard.

"No," he replied. "I was lunching out."

"Is she pretty quiet now?" asked Lancaster, of Mrs. Palliser.

"Yes, I'm thankful to say she is," said Mrs. Palliser. "I did all I could to get her to go to bed, you know, when I saw how things were, but the poor dear got so angry, and put on such an air of offended dignity, that I thought it wiser to desist. I'm afraid her mind's quite gone."

"Are you sure she doesn't recognize your husband?" asked the doctor.

"I don't think she does, but I can't say for certain," replied Mrs. Palliser. Then, as an irrepressible sense of the ludicrous struggled with her grief, she added, laughing hysterically at the idea—"She seems to have entirely forgotten his name, and insists upon addressing him as Melchisedec!"

"Well, well," said the doctor, soothingly. "Palliser, just go and get your mother a glass of wine, will you? Nay"—as Mrs. Palliser made a gesture of refusal—"you must be guided by me. You have had a great shock, evidently, and a little stimulant will do you good. Come, you mustn't allow yourself to be upset; we can't have you falling ill, you know. After all, when a person gets to her age one must be prepared for changes. Tell me one thing more. How has her general health been, lately?"

"Her health has been tolerably good," said Mrs. Palliser, "but she has seemed more feeble, somehow. She has not walked so much, and once or twice has complained of sleeplessness at night."

"Ah," remarked the doctor, thoughtfully.

In a minute or two Gerard re-entered the room, bringing a decanter of port and some glasses. Dr. Lancaster insisted on Mrs. Palliser drinking a glassful, which braced her nerves considerably; and then he took one himself, though he only sipped it. Gerard, he noticed, looked pale and shocked, and, at his suggestion, drank a mouthful, too.

"Now let us go into the next room," said Lancaster.

They rose, and Mrs. Palliser led the way across the hall. She listened at the door for a moment, but no sounds were audible from within; then she opened it softly, and motioned the doctor to go first.

It was a very long, spacious, handsome room, tastefully furnished, and gay with dwarf-palms and other decorative shrubs; a great contrast to the one they had just left. Mr. Palliser, looking haggard and anxious, was pacing slowly up and down; while at the far end, close by one of the windows, sat the poor old lady herself, to all appearance knitting as industriously as usual. But alas, the stitches came out as fast as they were made, and she held in her hands nothing but a tangled mass of worsted; instead of her usual placid look, her eyes were wandering and shifty; and as she plied her unprofitable task, and counted her abortive stitches, she glanced every now and then suspiciously about the room, murmuring incoherently to herself.

"Lancaster," said Mr. Palliser, stopping short in his walk, and grasping the doctor's hands almost convulsively, "thank God you've come. My wife has told you?"—in an undertone.

"She has," replied the doctor. "We'll see what can be done."

He walked up the room to where the old lady was sitting, the three others remaining at a short distance. At first she did not seem aware of his proximity. Then she said, in a clear voice and with a cheerful smile:

"Well, Mrs. Palliser! And how are you feeling, this fine day?"

The old lady raised her eyes, and then withdrew them. Lancaster kept his firmly fixed on her, and then, after some further hesitation, she looked at him again.

"You remember me, don't you?" he continued, sitting down.

Her eyes fell, and she seemed struggling against some will, or influence, external to herself, which prompted her to look up. She tried to avoid Lancaster's steady gaze, and turned her eyes

this way and that, shiftily; and it was not till some thirty seconds of this silent duel between the two had elapsed that the conquest of the weak will by the strong one was achieved. Then, painfully and reluctantly, she gave way.

"Come, you mustn't pretend that you forget me, Mrs. Palliser," said Dr. Lancaster, taking her hand in his firm grasp, and looking her full in the eyes.

"You're not an organ-grinder, are you?" said the old lady at last.

Gerard turned rather sick. He had never seen a person mentally afflicted before; besides, he was fond of his grandmother, and this sudden aberration shocked him infinitely.

"No, indeed I'm not," answered Dr. Lancaster.

"Nor the Archbishop of Hanover?" pursued the old lady, with fierce suspicion.

"I wouldn't be such a thing for all the world," replied the doctor, earnestly.

"My dearest mother," cried Mrs. Palliser, unable to contain herself any longer, "have you forgotten us all? Don't you remember Dr. Lancaster, whom you met at old Nanny Goodman's, you know?"

"And pray who spoke to you, miss?" exclaimed the old lady, drawing herself up in sudden indignation. "This gentleman is an old friend of mine; he's come to pay me a visit, and I'll thank you to keep your distance. You've no idea what a flighty little creature she is, Sir Anthony," she continued, turning to Dr. Lancaster. "You must make allowances for her; she was very badly brought up."

This was too much for Mrs. Palliser the younger. Do what she would, it was impossible to suppress a wild desire to laugh. She hid her face in her handkerchief and turned away.

"And pray how long have you been here, Sir Anthony?" said the old lady, with more than her usual stateliness.

"I've only just come," replied the doctor.

"Ah, it's a pity you weren't here to lunch," resumed the old lady, nodding mysteriously. "Such pranks! such capers! such a turn-out! Two of them, you know—sitting on the mantelpiece, and making faces at me all the time. They wanted me to go to Hanover with them, my dear, and see all the mushrooms, and organ-grinders, and catherine-wheels—I'm told they live on catherine-wheels there—and they grinned at me, and winked,

winked, winked, till I thought the legs would have come off the table; but I wasn't going to risk *my* reputation, not for Don Quixote or Sardanapalus or any one of 'em, and at last Melchisedec got up and turned them both out of the room. I don't know how it 'll end, I'm sure, but I thought I'd just mention the matter to you, Sir Anthony, in case there should be anything wrong with the cabbages next year, and then no one will be able to say that it was my fault."

"You have done perfectly right," replied the doctor, very gravely. "Always tell me whenever anything of the sort occurs to annoy you again. But I think you needn't have any fear. I will give strict orders to the police to be on the lookout."

"I told you they were both gone, you know, mother," said Mr. Palliser, who was greatly moved.

The old lady looked keenly at him, as though in perplexity; Dr. Lancaster never for a moment relaxing his firm grip of her hand, or removing his eye from hers.

"I dare say you did, Melchisedec," she said, a smile for the first time playing on her lips; but you know, my dear, you're such a hopeless liar that it's perfectly impossible to believe a word you say."

Even Gerard smiled. Poor Mr. Palliser glared round the room, as much as to say, "Hear that, ye gods!" while his wife threw up her hands in bewilderment, and then produced that peculiar change of countenance which results from an equal impulse to laugh and to cry simultaneously.

"Come, then, we won't think about them any more," resumed Dr. Lancaster, with his most professional air. "You must try and keep quiet, you know, and not worry yourself about such things, which are quite beneath the notice of a person like yourself."

"Quiet, Sir Anthony!" exclaimed the old lady, tragically. "And how can I be quiet, pray, with that fidgety minx prancing and careering about the place from morning till night? There she goes, hopping and skipping all over the room—dancing here, pirouetting there, never an instant at peace, for all the world like a jackdaw in a Dutch oven with a bill-of-lading in its beak. Ah, don't talk to me, you giddy little mountebank!"—shaking her head threateningly at Mrs. Palliser, who, poor woman, more than half believed herself to be the victim of some dreadful nightmare. "I know all about your goings on; though what you and Melchisedec

have to do in my house at all is a mystery to me—I don't know who asked you. What's that you've been putting on your head, pray, and how is it that you've taken out your eyes?"

"Marmaduke," said his wife, faintly, "this is becoming more than I can bear. Let us see if she recognizes Gerard."

"A good thought," said Dr. Lancaster, still keeping his eye upon his patient. "Gerard, come and speak to her."

Gerard somewhat diffidently came forward, and stood by her chair. The old lady slowly turned her head towards him, and scanned his features with a puzzled look. "Ah, Marmaduke, my dear!" she said in a soft voice. "You're growing apace, my boy; you'll soon be a man now. Put your hand on my forehead, my dear; there's a noise inside it, a buzzing, you know, my dear, and it troubles me; ah—that's better, your hand's cool and soft, Marmaduke, and you were always a good son to me—so, so."

Her voice grew fainter, and the worried, excited look in her eyes gradually died away. Mrs. Palliser exclaimed under her breath—"Oh, my dear, she's taking him for you!"—and the doctor, willing to trust her for a short time to this new influence, went to a writing-table on one side, and, drawing a small case from his pocket, asked for a glass of water. "I'll give her a sedative," he remarked, "and then we must put her to bed. There's too much excitement there altogether. A sound sleep will do her good."

It was some time before the old lady could be prevailed upon to take the draught. Not even the skilful blandishments of "Sir Anthony" had the desired effect. Eventually, however, Gerard offered his assistance, and the old lady accepted it from his hands. Then Lancaster addressed himself to the task of getting her upstairs.

"Indeed I couldn't think of such a thing, Sir Anthony," she said politely. "I know how to entertain distinguished guests better than that. Why, we should have all the grasshoppers in the parish round us in no time. Think of that—why there must be millions of 'em you know, all chattering and whispering, and tumbling round and round like wheels—wheels within wheels, like the catherine-wheels in Ezekiel—so high that they were dreadful. I know all about them, Sir Anthony, and I must be on my guard, strictly on my guard, or they'll begin to buzz again—buzz, buzz, buzz—"

Again her voice grew fainter, and she fell back gently in the chair.

"Do you hear them now?" asked Lancaster, in a monotonous voice, keeping his eyes steadfastly on hers. The others all held their breath.

"I've heard them for years," said the old lady, in a hoarse whisper, "and the wheels—the dreadful wheels—they are all inside my head."

"Then come with me, and you'll not hear them any more," said Lancaster, in the same concentrated tone.

He took both her hands and grasped them firmly in his own. She lay back, gazing at him as though half-fascinated, half-bewildered. For nearly five minutes did the struggle last, the tick of the clock on the mantel-piece sounding clear and loud in the dead silence. At last she gave way. For the second time the strong will triumphed over the weak one.

"Oh, Sir Anthony! Sir Anthony!" she cried.

Then the doctor arose, and, drawing her hand through his arm, led her unresistingly towards the door. Mrs. Palliser immediately rushed up-stairs to the old lady's bedroom, ringing for one of the servants. There was no longer any trouble. They undressed her hastily, and succeeded in putting her to bed, murmuring feebly the while. In a few moments her lips ceased to move. The opiate began to act. A calm expression gradually came over the eager, shrewd old face, so worn and wrinkled; her eyes closed, and she was soon sleeping like a child.

Mrs. Palliser immediately went down-stairs to inform her husband of the fact, while Dr. Lancaster remained watching at the bedside. She found him greatly agitated; Gerard, too, was looking rather white, after the scene he had gone through; and the temporary respite she announced was therefore very welcome. But of course it was not in either Mr. or Mrs. Palliser to contain their souls in silence for very long, and the next moment they gave free vent to their distress.

"The most awful thing that has ever happened to me in the whole course o' my life!" burst out the former, as though challenging creation to disprove his words.

"I never knew anything like it since I was born!" ejaculated his wife, by way of capping his utterance.

"I shall never forget her look when she said the vases were making faces at her," remarked Mr. Palliser. "It horrified me as much as if I'd seen a ghost."

"I don't wonder," said Mrs. Palliser, shuddering. "I felt for

a moment as though I must be in a dream. And it came so suddenly, too; such a dear, shrewd, quick-witted old thing as she was—the very last person in the world to have gone off like that.”

“I don’t remember anything queer about her lately,” said Mr. Palliser, “do you?”

“Nothing, my dear,” replied his wife. “Nothing whatever. Of course,” she added, as a recollection of the sun-bonnet crossed her mind, “she always had her little—er—peculiarities, you know. She was just the merest trifle eccentric, so to speak. But anything like *this*—”

The door opened, and they all turned eagerly to Dr. Lancaster, who now appeared from up-stairs.

“Well?” said Mr. Palliser.

“She is sleeping beautifully,” answered the doctor, “and will probably sleep on for the whole night. I shall expect to find her considerably better to-morrow morning.”

“But—but what is it? What’s the meaning of it all?” Mr. Palliser broke out. “We’ve no insanity in our family; she’s been one of the most active-minded women I’ve ever known—one of the clearest heads—and now she suddenly goes off like this! It’s a terrible thing for us all, Lancaster. Insanity in a family’s no joke, I can tell you. What can have brought it on?”

“Yes, you’ve no idea what a clever, strong-minded woman she was in her younger days,” chimed in Mrs. Palliser. “The books she’d read, and the conversations she’d hold with literary men, you know, and the way she used to argue upon subjects of which I know no more than a child-in-arms—and then, to think of this terrible collapse! O God, preserve us all from a like calamity!” exclaimed the poor lady, to whose excited imagination the possibility of herself, her husband, and her son going all mad together now assumed an alarming shape.

“My dear lady,” said Dr. Lancaster, reassuringly, “believe me that you take far too serious a view of the affair. The case is a very simple one, though of course it is distressing enough. It is nothing more than a break-up of the constitution. There is no question of hereditary taint. The old lady’s stock of vitality has held out bravely all these years, but no one could expect that it would last forever; the painful part of it is the suddenness with which it has come, and the form which the collapse has taken. It might have affected her differently, of course—as by paralysis, for instance. But it has immediately disorganized the brain, and the

result is proportionately distressing. There you have the whole matter in a nutshell."

"But she'll never recover?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"No, that is impossible," replied the doctor. "In fact, this is the beginning of the end; I fear you must be prepared for your mother's death before many months are over. I think you'll find that she will grow weaker gradually, and die quite quietly at last."

The announcement was at once a shock and a relief. Mr. Palliser became less excited, and his wife shed a quiet tear or two.

"But—Dr. Lancaster," she said, with a certain hesitation, "I do hope the poor old dear won't always be so dreadful as she was to-day. Those horrible fancies, and all that wild, nightmare talk—I couldn't possibly bear a continuation of them. It would drive me crazy. My nerves at this moment are in such a state—"

"I don't think there's much fear of that," said Dr. Lancaster. "There was a good deal of excitement this afternoon, with a touch of feverishness—all that will be gone in the morning. You'll find she'll ramble a good deal, no doubt, but I don't think there'll be anything very painful about it. Of course, she must have a proper nurse."

"Where can we get one—and how soon?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"I'll telegraph for one to-night, and she'll be here early to-morrow—probably before the patient is awake," said Dr. Lancaster.

"Thank you ever so much," said Mrs. Palliser, whose mind was now considerably relieved. "I don't know what we should have done without you, Dr. Lancaster."

"You've been the greatest possible comfort to us," said her husband.

"Well, that is what we doctors are for," replied Lancaster, smiling. "By-the-way—it would be as well for some one to stay in your mother's room to-night."

"Oh, of course," assented Mrs. Palliser. "Jane shall have a shake-down upon the sofa—the woman, you know, who helped to put her into bed. She's a strong, sensible sort of person who can be trusted—and I don't think she'll mind just for this once."

In a short time the doctor left to despatch his telegram, promising to return the first thing in the morning. It may be safely said that, of all the family, the patient herself was the only one who slept well and soundly that night. Mrs. Palliser was seriously unnerved, and her anxiety lest the old lady should wake up prematurely and indulge in more "dreadfulness," as she phrased it,

deprived her of that rest which sheer fatigue would otherwise have brought about. All went well, however, and when breakfast-time at length arrived they found the doctor's prediction amply and satisfactorily fulfilled. The old lady awoke calmer and better altogether. Her mind was still astray; but she no longer talked so as to curdle poor Mrs. Palliser's blood, simply rambling gently on every now and then, confused and uncertain in her recognition of persons, and to all appearance physically very weak. About ten o'clock the nurse arrived from London—a stout, pleasant-looking young woman, with quiet manners and a watchful eye, who gained Mrs. Palliser's confidence at once. Happily, too, the old lady made no objection to her—did not seem to notice her, indeed; and in a few hours was in most satisfactory subjection. All of which Dr. Lancaster noted with great content, investing Nurse Osborne with complete authority under himself. The affairs of the house flowed back into their usual channel, with the sole difference that one of the family was now isolated; and in a week they were all so much accustomed to the change that they felt as though it must have always been so.

And yet there was one member of the circle whom the incident affected in a very marked degree. Gerard, always inclined to pessimistic views of life, became conscious that his constitutional melancholy had been deepened, and another weight suddenly thrown upon his mind. Everything, somehow, looked dark to him. Reticent as he was, he was by no means unobservant; and there had been little indications, lately, that everything was not going quite prosperously with his father's affairs—frowns and troubled looks over the Stock Exchange quotations in the morning paper, unexpected "calls" on shares, more than one failure of a dividend that had been counted on, and so forth; it seemed to him that all was not so sound as it should have been, and, in spite of his natural tendency to introspectiveness and abstract thought, he was quite shrewd enough in more practical matters when once they were forced upon his notice. Then the strange and unhealthy attraction exerted upon him by Madame Mirabel was a source of constant torment. His "inherited instincts," as he called his conscience, condemned the passion rigorously, and in his stronger moments he loathed himself for having fallen so low as to love the wife of a man he called his friend. But struggle against it as manfully as he would, the passion existed and would not be quenched; and how, he asked himself, could life be worth living as long as he was

the subject of so torturing, so dishonorable a conflict? Then he braced himself, and vowed that he would pluck the evil tendency out by the roots, even though it should cause him agony, like destroying the nerve of a tooth; and would school his entire nature to lead the life intellectual. The very day after he had taken his resolution he witnessed the sudden and irrevocable extinction of the brightest, keenest, and most cultured intellect of his home circle. No wonder that a youth so constituted should give in to the pessimism of his disposition, and cry that the world is a delusion, that everything is impermanent, that life itself is sorrowful and hollow, and that, if it is to be lived, the only chance of escaping bitterness lies in the annihilation of all passion, all restlessness, and all desire!

CHAPTER XI

CLOUDS

A SUDDEN change, very characteristic of our English summers, now took place in the weather. Hitherto the season had been an unusually fine one. Weeks of hot, genial sunshine had succeeded each other almost without a break, everything pointed to a splendid harvest, and the country had been wearing its gayest and most attractive aspect. Then the barometer began to fall. The weather became cold and unsettled; a chilly rain set in, driven obliquely by strong north-easterly winds, and the sun seemed to have retired from active service altogether. Poor Mrs. Palliser, who had a bad circulation, took to woollen wrappers and a fire; her husband, vaguely uncomfortable, perplexed yet not in despair, found refuge from disturbing money-articles in a violent cold in the head; while Gerard, in gaiters and thick boots, sought oblivion of his own troubles by taking interminable walks across country in the pouring rain.

But it was not only the weather which had suddenly turned perverse. The political firmament became overcast. Rumors of a Russian conspiracy in the Balkans, combined with French intrigues in Egypt, provoked a feeling of general uneasiness; a leading Minister, speaking at a public banquet, gave the customary assurances that peace was certain and war impossible in such very guarded, involved, and ambiguous words that some people understood them as a warning that hostilities were on the point of breaking out; an old French apple-woman, straying inadvertently with her basket across the German frontier, was immediately arrested by the military on plea of suspicion that she was a distinguished general in disguise—an outrage which set all Paris in a flame; and finally, a black leather bag, which looked as though it might contain dynamite, was discovered beneath the Woolsack in the House of Lords. The effect of all these "political straws" upon the Bourses of Europe was of course disastrous. Consols fell, and money tightened. Under ordinary circumstances all this

would not have mattered very much, for in spite of everything the rulers of Europe did somehow manage not to go to war—a most creditable and statesmanlike achievement, when we recollect that each potentate had constituted himself Chief Peacekeeper of the Continent, and could by no means brook the smallest rivalry or infringement of his prerogative on the part of any other potentate, great or small; but unfortunately there were other causes at work, prejudicial to a sound financial state, and the outlook grew gradually darker. For months past there had been a terrible amount of over-speculation. Shares which had no existence had of course been bought and sold over and over again. Time bargains had already led to the declaration of several large defaulters. An enormous amount of scrip was held on hypothecation by the banks; prices fell almost daily, more cover was demanded—in some cases not forthcoming—and advances were almost unobtainable at any figure. It was this shaky and threatening condition of affairs that now began to render even Mr. Palliser a trifle uneasy, for all that he was so sanguine and so buoyant naturally; and well it might, if the truth were only known, for the good gentleman's investments were not all of them of the very soundest sort.

One evening Gerard was sitting with the Mirabels. It was about nine o'clock—chilly, drizzling, and comfortless; but there was a bit of bright fire in the grate, which looked quite cheerful. Mirabel, in his gayest mood, occupied a luxurious easy-chair on the side farthest from the door, a shaded lamp standing on a table at his elbow; his wife sat opposite, her face in the shadow. They were talking of the unsettled condition of public affairs, political and pecuniary.

"Ah, yes!" exclaimed Mirabel, in answer to a remark of Gerard's about the uncertainties and troubles of life generally. "It is all unsatisfactory enough, no doubt. We come into the world, and we must either eat or die. If we have enough to eat, well and good; but if not—ah, then it is not good, because we must suffer cruelly. The trouble is with our bodies. If we had no bodies—ah, how cheap it would be! No food or wine to buy or run in debt for, no tailors' bills—no worry, no pain, no anything. That is the ideal existence. And it will come for all of us, some day."

"I don't think this world would be so bad if we were better adapted to our environment," said Gerard.

"Of course not!" said Mirabel, laughing. "Complete adaptation

to one's environment means complete satisfaction, complete happiness. It is heaven, and the only heaven there is or can be. And I think it will exist in the new sphere. Strange! A few weeks ago I thought I should be there by now. And I wonder where I would have gone to first. Ah, it is a grand field, a grand field—the Illimitable Space! But there is nothing so foolish as to go abroad before you know your own country. I am very anxious to explore the Pleiades, but I must do the Solar System first of all. Mars, Venus, and above all Saturn—Saturn with his rings of wonder and of beauty! Ah, there is a prospect for you. Come, Gerard—would you not like it too? Suppose we go together!”

His tone was gay, playful, but eager—with the eagerness of a child at the prospect of some delightful journey or anticipated treat. Gerard laughed, and then heaved a light sigh.

“Yes,” he said, “I wouldn’t mind—if only I were as sure of it all as you are.”

“You are too sceptical,” rejoined Mirabel, with an air of cheery reproof. “You prefer to doubt everything. My wife is worse—she deny everything. I have no more hope for her. But you—ah, you will agree with me, some day.”

“It wouldn’t require much to convince me that there may be a better sort of world than this,” replied Gerard. “There could scarcely be a worse, I should think.”

“Ah, bah!” exclaimed the other. “It has his alleviations—everything has his alleviations. Even looking forward to the next one is an alleviation. It will be a great thing to *live*—to enjoy a life that shall be full; full, and perfect, and free.”

“I hope you won’t forget the friends you leave behind you,” said Gerard, smiling. “You can’t take us all with you, I’m afraid.”

“I do not think I shall forget you,” replied Mirabel, quietly.

It struck Gerard as a little curious that he did not include his wife. Perhaps it was from a delicate sense of her total disbelief in a future state.

“Well, and how is the old good papa?” resumed Mirabel, after a pause.

“Oh—he’s got an awful cold,” said Gerard. “Blows his nose like a trumpet, you know, and waters at the eyes. Otherwise he’s all right.”

“Blows the nose like a trumpet, eh?” said the other. “Well, that is a good sign; it shows he is a strong man. Does he make a very large noise when he sneeze?”

"Bellows like a bull," answered Gerard with a slight grin.

"Excellent!" said Mirabel. "He must be what you call 'heartyp old cock.' All that is very good for the lungs; almost as good as laughing. To laugh, and to shout, and to blow the nose like a bull, is a great preservative of the health. His bad cold will not do him any harm."

"No," said Gerard, rather slowly. "I fancy he's a little worried, too, about matters in the City; and then, of course, we've all been a good deal cut up lately."

"Ah, yes; the poor grandmamma!" said Mirabel, in a low voice.

Madame Mirabel had made no attempt to join in the conversation. She was sitting a little apart from the others, and seemed engrossed in her own thoughts. She now spoke for the first time.

"I thought I heard the door," she said, without moving.

"The door?" repeated Mirabel. "It must be the good Lancaster; he have neglected us very much of late. He want a good round scolding."

"You've been so much better, you know," said his wife.

A step was heard in the hall, and Dr. Lancaster entered briskly. Mirabel received him with a torrent of playful reproaches. Gerard rose and offered him his chair, taking, himself, a vacant seat next to his hostess.

"Yes, I know I've been very remiss," acknowledged Lancaster with a laugh. "However, I don't think you look much the worse for it. How have you been since I saw you? It must be nearly a week ago."

"Oh, pretty well—very much as usual," answered Mirabel.

"That's all right," said Lancaster, rubbing his hands. "How cosey this fire looks; it's wretchedly chilly outside, especially driving. By-the-way, talking of fires, there's just been a fire at Churt, and I have positively been helping to put it out."

"At Churt," remarked Mirabel. "Was he a big one?"

"He might have been, if he hadn't been taken in time," replied the doctor, laughing. "And what house do you think it was?" he continued, addressing Gerard.

"I can't possibly tell," said Gerard.

"Why, the very cottage I called at the other day when you were with me," continued Lancaster; "inhabited"—turning to Madame Mirabel—"by an old woman and her daughter, a girl who for some weeks past has lost the use of her legs. The mother was out when it took place and the girl was alone. Well—"

"Alone?" interrupted Gerard. "Why, she couldn't stir hand or foot! She wasn't burned, was she?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Lancaster. "The fire was the best thing that ever happened to her in her life. She turned her head round in bed, apparently, attracted by the blaze of the window-curtains, and then, in a moment of panic, leaped out as actively as you or I, and ran screaming into the next cottage. You see I was right about her legs; there was nothing wrong with them at all, and she forgot all about them under the excitement of sudden fear. I happened to be passing a few minutes afterwards, and rendered what assistance I could. But it has cured the girl, and I hope she'll have more confidence in what I tell her next time."

"But what was the matter with her? Tell us all about it," said Mirabel, with interest.

Dr. Lancaster accordingly gave them a full account of the case, with the details of which Gerard was already acquainted. The story delighted Mirabel; even his wife was interested.

"The influence of mind on matter," said the former, "is not only a fact which is beyond dispute, but one of the most important agencies in the human life. We know very little about it yet, but the fact itself is recognized, and that will lead to investigation. You know how I explain it, of course. Well, in a few years all our knowledge of it will be gradually systematized, and then—"

"And then what?" said Lancaster, smiling, as the other paused.

"No, no; the conditions are unfavorable," said Mirabel, with a laugh. "Julie will mock at me. She don't believe in anything."

"Perhaps I am more open to conviction than you suppose," remarked his wife, with a slight smile.

"Well, I have a piece of news for you," said Lancaster, seeing that Dr. Mirabel was not anxious to pursue the subject. "Do you remember my saying something to you about a friend of mine named Bretschneider—Dr. Bretschneider?" he asked, turning to Madame Mirabel.

"Bretschneider? No, I don't think I do," she replied, abstractedly.

"Oh, surely you can't have forgotten," returned Lancaster. "I was telling you about it some three weeks or a month ago; how he wanted me to go and take part in a conference of doctors respecting some investigations that have been made recently into these reputed cancer remedies of Count Mattei's, only there was

some hitch as to their being all able to meet at the proposed time. I thought you seemed rather interested in it."

"Ah, I do remember now," said Madame Mirabel. "It had completely slipped my memory. The meeting was to have been at Lausanne, wasn't it?"

"Lucerne," corrected the doctor. "The symposium was to have consisted of Bretschneider himself, a French physician named De Véranges, and two Italian surgeons; I was to make the fifth. Well, the difficulty seems now to have been got over, for I had a telegram from Bretschneider this very afternoon, asking me to run over there at once. He says the others are expected about Sunday."

"Really?" said Madame Mirabel. "And do you think you shall go?"

"Well, it certainly is a temptation," replied Lancaster. "The subject is one that interests me deeply, and I have long desired an opportunity of looking into it. Any theory, any claim even, that professes to be supported by results, has a strong attraction for me. Of course I know well enough that Mattei is denounced as a quack by many people. Well, if he is one, the sooner we expose him the better. If not—if he really does possess a pathological secret of such immense value as he says—it ought to be investigated. M. de Véranges, I am told, has made a close study of the question, and I am very anxious to hear what he has to say about it."

"And have you no predisposition either way?" asked Madame Mirabel.

"None whatever," said the doctor promptly. "My own theory of disease is simple enough. The human body is a mass of bacilli, germs, bacteria, spores, and microbes. Some of these are beneficent—necessary, indeed, to health. Others are malignant, and produce disease. These are facts; and on these facts I bring to bear the theory—which is only a working hypothesis, so to speak—that the activity of either class is determined mainly, at any rate, by the ebb and flow of the vital principle. When a man's vitality is strong and vigorous, the noxious organisms become proportionately enfeebled, and are then preyed upon by their rivals; when the ebb sets in, the health-producing germs lose their power, and a reversal of the process is the result. This is the hypothesis I am anxious to put to every possible test, and that is one reason why I should be so sorry to lose the opportunity now offered."

"Quite so," remarked Madame Mirabel, thoughtfully. "Well, I hope you will enjoy the trip. It will be delightful to get out of all this cold and wet. I suppose your patients, in the meantime—"

"Don't imagine I haven't thought of them," interrupted Lancaster. "Of course you're thinking of your husband. What do you say, Mirabel? Don't you think I'm paying your improved health the greatest compliment I can, in proposing to leave you for a week or two?"

Mirabel had made no remark when Lancaster had first spoken of his intention, but he had listened to it in something like dismay. It was certainly a blow to him. Not only did he prize the companionship of Lancaster for its own sake, but he had become firmly convinced that his renewed vitality was directly due to some vitalizing or magnetic influence exercised by Lancaster himself; and the threatened withdrawal of this, though only for a time, disturbed him very much. He was, however, far too unselfish and sweet-tempered to show the slightest reluctance when the appeal was made.

"No doubt, no doubt," he replied, with a smile. "You are the best judge. I am entirely in your hands. But I shall be very glad when you come back."

"If I thought there was the slightest danger of a relapse I wouldn't dream of going," said Lancaster, seriously. "But you really have gained so much strength lately that I am not afraid. Charlton will look after you while I'm away, if necessary. You know I always believed that I had nothing to do with your recovery. It has been a case in which the vital forces have suddenly rallied, and all we have to do now is to keep them up to the mark. I shall be very curious to see how you look when I come back again."

"Shall you call at our place before you go?" asked Gerard.

"Certainly," replied the doctor. "But I leave your grandmother in the best possible hands. You'll find Nurse Osborne a much more efficient doctor than I am, in that particular case. I've the fullest confidence in her, both as regards experience and tact. I'll look in some time in the morning, probably."

"When do you think you shall start?" inquired Madame Mirabel.

"I shall try and get away by the night boat from Folkestone," he answered, lighting a cigar.

"We shall all miss you very much," she said, with a slight sigh.

"Ah, that we shall," added Mirabel.

"Well, I'm not going away forever," said Lancaster, smiling.

"You'll have a wretched crossing, I'm afraid," remarked Madame Mirabel.

"I don't suppose I shall be as comfortable as I am now."

The conversation flagged a little after this, and in about a quarter of an hour Lancaster began to think of moving, on the plea of having letters to write and various necessary arrangements to make before going to bed. Mirabel was silent and depressed. He had become so dependent on Lancaster's companionship and "influence," as he phrased it, that he found it difficult to envisage the withdrawal of either; while Madame Mirabel, though calm enough, looked more than usually thoughtful. When at last Lancaster got up, and said good-bye, it was only natural that Gerard should propose to accompany him. This, however, the doctor immediately discouraged.

"No, no, I don't want to take you away," he said; "besides, I'm not going in your direction, so I can't offer you a lift."

"Don't go yet, Gerard," said Mirabel, almost sharply. So he stayed.

Then the adieus were exchanged; Lancaster promising, however, to look in again on the morrow if he could possibly manage it. Madame Mirabel accompanied him to the front door, and remained a short time in conversation with him.

"It's very strange he goes away just now," remarked Mirabel when they were alone.

"It does seem sudden," said Gerard. "Still," he added after a pause, "I'm sure he wouldn't leave you if he thought he couldn't do so safely."

"No, I dare say not," replied the other, and relapsed into silence.

In a few minutes Madame Mirabel re-entered. There was a slight flush upon her cheeks, and an unwonted light in her eyes, that might have been noticed had it not been that the greater part of the room was in deep shade. She now came forward with a brisk step, and resumed her former seat.

"Well, we shall see him back soon, I suppose," she observed in her usual matter-of-fact way. "It must be delightful at Lucerne, and I expect he wants a holiday."

"It'll be very hot, won't it?" said Gerard.

"Possibly," she replied. "Some people don't mind the heat. Anything would be preferable to this, I should think."

"I wish things weren't looking so queer in the City," remarked Gerard, after another pause.

"Does your father seem much worried?" asked Madame Mirabel.

"I think he does," was the reply. "He's a very sanguine man naturally, and I've never seen him look quite like this before."

"I met him in London the other day," she continued. "I told you of it, you know, at the time. He certainly didn't look anxious then; he was the picture of complacency and good spirits I thought."

The fact was, that, although "things" had worn a very threatening appearance for some time past, nothing had so far occurred to arouse any apprehensions in the mind of Mr. Palliser with respect to his own investments; so that when his stock-broker had spoken to him of the increasing tightness of money and the queer-ness of the outlook generally, it made no particular impression. Had he pushed his inquiries further, he would have obtained an insight into the true state of affairs; this, however, in his usual happy-go-lucky way, he entirely failed to do; and it was not until he had received the disagreeable warnings alluded to in the last chapter that he began to scan the money articles in his morning paper with a trepidation as painful as it was new to him. These symptoms were not lost on Gerard, though he was as yet quite ignorant of his father's actual circumstances.

Mirabel's gayety having, to all appearance, temporarily forsaken him, his wife now made an effort to keep up the conversation. She and Gerard talked quietly for some time upon indifferent topics, the latter doing his utmost to conceal the depression that he really felt. But, do what he might, an unconquerable sense of foreboding stole over him, as undefinable as it was painful. He knew himself to be dangerously attracted by the woman who sat near him in the semi-darkness, and the knowledge of her husband's presence was irksome to him; at the same time he was well aware that that presence was his truest safeguard, and, mingled with a torturing uncertainty as to whether there were any hidden feeling for himself in her own breast, was the self-reproachful shame which took all the pleasure from his love. At last the ordeal grew too severe for him. He got up suddenly, and said he must be going. Mirabel, now professing unusual weariness, made no objection, and Madame Mirabel saw him to the door.

"He'll want more looking after, now that Lancaster's away," Gerard said, as they stood upon the threshold.

"I am equal to it," she replied, with a smile.

"You are the very best and dearest woman I ever knew!" he exclaimed, with a sudden impulse, as he took her hand.

She looked him steadily in the eyes with a curious expression. "It is pleasant to have the good opinion of one friend at least," she answered, after a pause.

"You have more than my 'good opinion'—and I believe you know it," he said in a low, fervent tone, almost a whisper. Then he raised her hand to his lips, kissed it passionately, and went out.

CHAPTER XII

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPOINTMENT

MADAME MIRABEL'S prediction that Lancaster would have a wretched crossing was amply fulfilled. That night was wet, cold, and rough, and Lancaster, who was a bad sailor, suffered very much. In spite of sickness, however, he resolutely refused to go below; the consequence of which was that he got almost soaked to the skin, and though he escaped the fetid odors of the cabin, which was strewn with persons in the acutest stage of the sea-agony, only did so at the expense of incurring a severe chill. The journey from Boulogne restored him to a certain extent, but on arriving in Paris he found himself so unwell that he deemed it prudent to remain there for a couple of nights. The Louvre Hotel had not then been removed to make way for the *magasins* which now occupy its site, and it was at the Louvre that he put up, sending a telegram to Dr. Bretschneider to explain the cause of his delay. As soon as he arrived he went to bed, like a prudent man; as night approached he became feverish, and slept ill; and it was not until the evening of the third day that he felt himself sufficiently recovered to proceed.

As he travelled southward the weather improved, and by the time he got to Basle it was extremely hot. He reached Lucerne on one of those blazing, dazzling days which are so enchanting for the first half-hour or so to a man just escaped from the cold and wet of England, but which so very soon become intolerable; and the first sight of the exquisite lake sparkling in the sunshine, and the rushing, wonderful, glorious green Reuss, with its quaint mediæval bridges, came upon him like a sudden glimpse of fairy-land. He drew a deep breath of satisfaction and delight; he had never been at Lucerne before, and felt that all the discomforts of his long journey were about to be amply made up to him. Having, after some slight delay, succeeded in obtaining his luggage, he confided it to the care of a porter from the Schweitzerhof who had come to meet the train, and, despising the idea of either fly or

omnibus, put up his umbrella and set off for that famous hostelry on foot. He was in a mood to be charmed with everything, and it is not too much to say that everything charmed him. The mountains were looking their very best. Pilatus on one side, the Righi on the other, stood out clear and bold against a dome of sapphire. The old watch-towers and undulating walls of the city, with their rich, dingy coloring, afforded a grateful contrast to the brilliancy by which they were surrounded, and the thick green foliage of the chestnut-trees on the farther bank of the river gave the finishing touch to a scene which struck the traveller as one of almost perfect beauty.

The only feature which appeared somewhat discordant to him was the presence of so many smartly dressed English people. He paid but little attention to the promenading crowds, however, and feasted his eyes on the river, the bridges, the mountains, and the lake; and had it not been that a trifling incident occurred when he was about half-way to his destination his enjoyment of the short walk he had undertaken would have been undisturbed. Even as it was, he was in no humor to complain. A sound of altercation reached him from a group of persons, two of whom were porters carrying luggage. The third was a thin, wiry-looking elderly woman, somewhat pretentiously dressed, who was objurgating the porters in rather a loud key and excessively doubtful English. Dr. Lancaster, thinking he might be of some service, slackened his pace, and then good-naturedly approached.

"Can I assist you in any way?" he asked, shrewdly divining that a confusion of tongues lay at the root of the difficulty.

The old woman glanced suspiciously at him for a moment, as though not quite sure whether he were friend or foe; then, assuming a somewhat stately air, broke forth into denunciations of her two attendants. They knew she had scarcely any time to catch the train, and yet they had loitered till the last moment; they were taking advantage of her necessities to extort ten times their proper wage, and now they had actually set down her boxes in the road and refused to budge another inch until their extravagant demands were complied with. But they were all alike—the whole nation was leagued together to rob unprotected travellers; she had been swindled ever since she first set foot in the place, and if ever she escaped with a whole skin she prayed Heaven to do so to her, and more also should she be fool enough to go near any such thieves and rascals any more.

Dr. Lancaster immediately assured her that she had a full half-hour to spare, so need not be anxious about her train; then, turning to the men, asked them in German what the trouble was. A very few words sufficed to show that the whole dispute had been founded on a misunderstanding. They had only asked the proper price for portage, and the old lady, apparently mistaking the figure, had point-blank refused to pay it, launching out into a torrent of indignation (in her own tongue) of which they did not understand a word. Lancaster saw at once how the mistake had arisen, and explained the true state of the case to the excited woman, who thereupon thanked him in most gushing style. It was perfectly clear to her, she said, that the men had told him a lie; but now that he had come to the rescue, and was able to talk to them in their own language, of course they had climbed down. The amount was then solemnly repeated on the one side and agreed to on the other; the porters reshouldered the boxes, and Dr. Lancaster, after a most dignified bow from the old woman, resumed his way to the hotel.

First he engaged a room, saw to the disposal of his luggage, and went up-stairs for a much-needed wash and change. Then, feeling considerably refreshed, and eager to explore the neighborhood, he came down and made for the front door.

"Is Dr. Bretschneider in?" he said to the hall-porter, on his way out.

The hall-porter could not say; people were going in and out constantly, and he didn't know all their names; but he would inquire, if monsieur would not object to waiting a few minutes.

"Oh, it's of no consequence," replied Lancaster. "I shall be back before very long."

Then, in spite of the broiling sun, he walked once or twice along the avenue skirting the lake, enjoying the occasional puffs of cool wind which came across the water from the snow-clad Alps of Engelberg and Uri. In a short time he turned down one of the streets, hap-hazard, and found himself in front of Thorwaldsen's inimitable Lion; and, when he had admired this sufficiently, spent half an hour of wondering delight in the Gletschergarten. Everything pleased him; and what pleased him most of all was the discovery that he had not outgrown his capacity for enjoyment — as so many of us do, alas! even before we arrive at Lancaster's not very venerable age. For a few hours he was as frankly and unreservedly happy as a boy, and when, a little later, he sat in the

cathedral, listening to the wonderful reverberations of Lemmens's "Storm," with its exquisite last note — that note which always makes me think of an angel's smile translated into music — he felt that he had not passed so satisfactory an afternoon for years.

The gong was being banged for dinner as he re-entered. Not seeing Bretschneider anywhere, he took his seat in a quiet corner, and dined comfortably alone, amusing himself by watching the various groups and parties in front of him. When he had finished he rose from the table, and, strolling towards the bureau, lighted a cigar.

"Can you tell me where I can find Dr. Bretschneider?" he inquired, addressing the clerk.

"Dr. Bretschneider? I do not know," replied that functionary. "Is he staying in the hotel?"

"I have every reason to believe so," said Lancaster, rather surprised. "He always puts up here."

"Well, we can easily see," said the clerk, turning over the pages of the Visitors' Book. "No—I don't see any such name here."

"That's very curious," remarked Lancaster. "Surely he'd have told me if he had gone anywhere else. Let me have a look, please."

He took the book and scanned its entries narrowly. No—there was nothing. Then he looked back; and at last he found it. Bretschneider had been there just a month before, and had left, four days after arrival, for Milan.

Lancaster was now completely puzzled.

"I don't understand this at all," he said, turning once more to the clerk. "I had a telegram from this gentleman only a few days ago, requesting me to meet him here. He must have come back meantime!"

The clerk examined the letter-rack. "Telegram did you say?" he answered. "Then I expect it's all right — he hasn't come yet, but he's coming. Here's a telegram that arrived for him three or four days ago."

Lancaster looked at it. "Is this the only one? No letter, or anything else?" he asked.

"Nothing," replied the clerk.

"My own telegram from Paris!" thought the doctor.

Sorely perplexed, he went out upon the Quay, determined to inquire at all the other hotels. His quest was fruitless. No such person had been seen or heard of. Dr. Bretschneider was evidently not in Lucerne.

And yet he must be. How else could the telegram be accounted for—the telegram in response to which Lancaster himself had come? That was distinctly dated from the Lucerne telegraph-office. Well, he would inquire there.

He went to the office and asked the clerk if he remembered such and such a message being handed in on the previous Monday morning. Of course the clerk was unable to remember anything about it, and naturally asked to see the telegram. But Lancaster, not imagining it would be required, had not brought it; he had even torn it up. It had been sent, no doubt—they had the usual record of it, so far, in the shape of counterfoil and entry; but as to remembering who it was that had handed it in, or any other detail which might have led to some elucidation of the mystery, the thing was quite impossible. Lancaster retired baffled.

His first impulse, as he walked meditatively back to his hotel, was to return to England at once. The next moment he saw the utter futility of such a course. Why not give himself a holiday, now that he was actually upon the Continent? Why not go on to Milan, and get an explanation of the mystery from Bretschneider himself? Then another contingency occurred to him. Bretschneider might be in some *pension*, or even have taken private apartments somewhere; he might—who knows?—have sent a letter to him, which had gone astray, or been delayed, misdirected, lost; perhaps, after all, it would be a little precipitate to leave Lucerne so soon. All the same, the position was most perplexing. He was utterly in the dark. Whichever way he acted, he might blunder. Then a new idea struck him. There were, besides himself, three other doctors in Lucerne, all having the same appointment with Bretschneider. They should be hunted up first, and then, if success failed him there, his only way would be to go straight on to Milan with as little further delay as possible.

Arrived once more at the Schweitzerhof he sat down at one of the writing-tables and wrote a letter. There was nothing in it that we do not know already, so we may be excused for looking over his shoulder.

“Schweitzerhof, Lucerne, Monday night.

“DEAR MADAME MIRABEL,—You have no doubt been surprised not to have heard from me since I left England. The fact is, I caught a rather bad chill on the steamer—the crossing was horrible, and my sufferings adequate to the expiation of any number of venial sins—and was consequently forced to take to my bed in

Paris; a misfortune which delayed me about three days. However, I am all right now, and, as you see, have arrived safely in Lucerne; but to my great annoyance and perplexity I cannot find Dr. Bretschneider anywhere, and am for the moment quite at a loss what to do. I do not think he is in this place at all, though he certainly must have been here a week ago, when he sent me that telegram; however, I shall continue my search to-morrow, and then if I discover nothing I may possibly run over to Milan, where he was last heard of. It would be a pity to come back at once.

"How is Mirabel? Give him my kindest regards. I need not urge you to look after him, ~~you~~ you are a pattern to all wives and nurses. Believe me,

"Ever yours most sincerely, EDWARD LANCASTER.

"P.S.—If you have anything to communicate, address to me here. I will leave instructions for all letters to be forwarded should I decide on moving south."

Next morning Lancaster procured a list of the chief *pensions*, and started off upon his rounds. Again he was unsuccessful. No such name as Bretschneider appeared in the Visitors' Book of any one of them; no one knew or had ever heard anything about him. There had been, as usual, plenty of doctors in Lucerne, but they were always coming and going. At last it occurred to Lancaster to inquire at the "English" apothecary's in the Züricherstrasse. Here he learned something. The man of medicine knew Dr. Bretschneider very well. The doctor had been there a month ago, and had then left for Milan, remarking that *he might possibly return in four or five weeks*, though he could not be sure. Those were his very words. He did not say, however, where he intended to remain in the meantime.

If this was the case, thought Lancaster, it was clearly impossible for him to communicate with Bretschneider either by letter or by telegram. He must go in search of him personally, should he decide on running the mystery to earth. Then he asked the chemist whether he knew anything of the other doctors, De Véranges and the two Italians. But the chemist had never even heard their names, and was entirely unable to throw any light upon their whereabouts.

One last chance remained. He inquired of M. Brünck the addresses of the resident physicians in Lucerne, and then, thanking him for his courtesy, stepped into the street again and turned his

face in the direction indicated. But he learned nothing. Only one of the local practitioners—a short, fat, bland little gentleman, with a pair of enormous spectacles which made him look rather like a benevolent owl—was acquainted with Dr. Bretschneider, and he had not very much to tell. Bretschneider had certainly been in Lucerne a month previously, and had then left for Milan; he had been hoping to meet two or three *confrères* for the purpose of holding some consultations with them, though upon what subject had not transpired; the difficulty, thought Dr. Lancaster's informant, lay in the inability of two doctors at Bologna to attend the conference, and he believed—though this was merely a conjecture on his part—that Dr. Bretschneider's journey southward had something to do with this. He had not heard from him since he went away, and scouted the suggestion that he had returned to Lucerne in the meantime.

Dr. Lancaster, a man who hated mysteries, now began to get rather angry; though he was fully aware that it was impossible to know whom to be angry with. What exasperated him was his threatened disappointment with regard to the conference upon a scientific problem in the elucidation of which he was profoundly interested, not to mention the insoluble enigma of the telegram. About the former point he did not care to speak, but he had no scruples respecting the latter, and thereupon told Dr. C—— the whole story. Bretschneider had sent him a telegram about a week ago, summoning him to Lucerne; and, now that he had arrived, not only was the man himself nowhere to be found, but everything pointed to the conclusion that he had not even been in the place when the telegram was despatched!

"It is certainly a most extraordinary affair," observed Dr. C——, assuming a judicial frown which had a very comical effect. "There is something in it, you may depend, of which neither you nor I have any suspicion at all."

"Clearly," replied Lancaster.

"It is equally clear," continued Dr. C——, wagging his head with the complacent air of a man to whom a brick wall presents no obstacle whatever when once he is determined to see through it, "that the telegram you refer to must have been sent by somebody."

Lancaster stared a little, and did not dispute the point.

"The question before us, then," resumed the other, warming to his subject, "is simply this—who was that somebody? Again the answer is clear: it was either Bretschneider, or somebody else."

"That is true of every telegram sent since telegraphy was first invented," remarked Lancaster, rather curtly.

"Not so fast, not so fast, my dear sir!" cried the little physician, with an airy wave of his little fat right hand. "No doubt, as you very justly observe, the proposition I have laid down is of universal application within the limits you so properly define; but it has a special significance for us in this particular case. Let us see, now," continued Dr. C——, beaming with pleasure at the sound of his own voice, and the prospect of hearing it as long as he could detain his visitor. "Let us argue upon the hypothesis that Bretschneider was the man. Then it follows that he must have been in Lucerne the day on which he telegraphed. But did he stay here, or did he go away again? Once more, he must have done either the one or the other. If he stayed, he is no doubt here still. If he went away—and *has not come back*—we must always make that reservation—it is clear that he cannot be in Lucerne now. See, now, how I am unravelling your mystery! I am great at analysis, my dear sir; I have a very analytical mind. Well, now, look where we have arrived. I have stripped the *affaire Bretschneider* of the accessories which distract; there remains only a residuum of tangible actualities; and where are we? The man has either been here and gone away, or he is actually in Lucerne at the present moment!"

"Which leaves us precisely where we were when we started," replied Lancaster, whose impatience was getting uncontrollable.

"Excellent!" exclaimed the little man, lighting a cigarette and flourishing it round his bald pate in a transport of enthusiasm. "My dear sir, it is evident that you are an intuitive thinker. For my own part, I am a logical thinker; and we both arrive at the same conclusion. So far, then, we are on the right road. That is a most satisfactory consideration. But there is still an alternative. Supposing the good Bretschneider has been made away with?"

"Impossible!" said Lancaster, drawing on his gloves.

"Improbable, at any rate," returned Dr. C——, puffing vigorously at his cigarette. "Let us, then, take up our stand upon the contrary hypothesis. Let us say that Bretschneider never sent your telegram at all. Clearly, then, somebody else must have done it. But who? That is the question which confronts us now."

"And that question is unanswerable," replied Lancaster.

"You know nobody in Lucerne?" asked the little doctor, sharply.

"Not a soul."

"You have made inquiries at the telegraph-office?"

"Certainly; but could get no information."

"You have no friend who may play a hoax, or enemy who seeks to injure you?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Lancaster, almost laughing.

"Very well, then," resumed the little man, with an oracular stare through his large spectacles, "I think I have succeeded in clearing the way before you. Bretschneider is evidently not in Lucerne now. You will not find him here, I am pretty sure. He would certainly have been here by now, as you say you yourself arrived two or three days late. Therefore you must change your field of inquiry. You must go to Milan, and if necessary to Bologna."

"I am afraid that's the only thing to be done," replied Lancaster, rising.

"Yes, I think I've proved that pretty conclusively," said the little man, in high good-humor with himself. "Believe me, my dear sir, there's nothing like the exhaustive or eliminative method in these puzzling cases. Dissect, dissect, and again dissect, and then if you don't arrive at the truth you are at any rate getting very near to it. I think I should have made an incomparable detective—I have such a very analytical mind. I should like—ah, so much!—to unravel all those complicated affairs of police which require the peculiar talent I possess. But alas! Instead of detecting criminals all I can do is to detect microbes. Well, good-bye, my dear sir; and if you find your friend—our friend, I should say—I hope you will write and tell me the solution of the whole mystery."

"Your great kindness to me merits a better return than that," responded Lancaster, who felt really grateful to the good-hearted little doctor in spite of his absurdities. "I will certainly not fail to let you know."

"And you must come and dine with me when you get back!" added Dr. C——, in a final burst of enthusiasm.

Lancaster smilingly waved his hand, and escaped. He had now made up his mind that there was nothing for it but to start in search of Bretschneider at once, as it was clear that something had gone wrong. He accordingly hurried back to the Schweitzer-

hof, consulted a time-table, and began to make preparations for departure; wrote a letter to Bretschneider, which he left for him at the hotel in case he should turn up subsequently, and decided to take the first train southward on the following day. After all, a few hours could not make much difference, and there was still something to be seen in Lucerne.

CHAPTER XIII

THE INFLUENCE OF THE WOMAN

THERE is a profound sociological truth in the saying that no man liveth to himself. No man, probably, existed whose associates were exactly the same as they would have been had they never been brought into contact with him. Insensibly they were affected, to a greater or more limited degree, by his looks, his words, his gestures, his own particular moral atmosphere; and when we consider human beings in the aggregate, and think how the influence of one man upon another is transmitted in its turn to others, and that each being is at once the source and the channel of such influences, crossing and recrossing without end, we may form some idea of the extent and power of the interaction. And the same may hold good in the sphere of biology. There is a sense in which some men may be said almost to keep other men alive, by sheer dint of moral energy. The influence of the strong man braces the weak one, and, by removing the depression, anxiety, or despair which is undermining his physical constitution, imparts new life and fresh activity to organs enfeebled by mental strain. The power of sympathy is great; for sympathy relieves the weight of burdens too heavy to be borne alone, and the heart's action becomes less labored, more normal, more natural. Faith in one able and willing to cure, half effects the cure itself; and the patient who, one moment, lies nervous and despairing, with irregular pulse and fevered brain, alone with his sufferings, receives an accession of vitality the moment the door opens and the strong, cheerful, able man appears who understands his case and undertakes to heal him. Pain itself grows less acute in such a presence; anxiety subsides; the physical conditions become proportionately more favorable to treatment. It seems almost as though these healing men—be they physicians or not—impart some of their own vitality to their feebler brethren; and, like Elisha with the son of the Shunammite, supply from their own powers the life that is needed by another.

The watchful and incessant care exercised by Dr. Lancaster over Mirabel ever since he took up the case, and the marked improvement that had manifested itself in consequence, had of course relieved the sick man's wife of that close attendance upon him which, up till then, had been an imperative necessity. For some weeks past, therefore, she had devoted a considerable portion of her time to her two favorite pursuits of reading and walking; while Mirabel spent most of his basking in the sunshine, cheerful and contented, never a day passing without a visit from one at least of his two friends Lancaster and Gerard. Now, however, all this was changed. The weather had broken up, and he felt the difference. Instead of sitting in the sunny garden, he was forced to content himself with an in-door life; his spirits flagged; there was no Lancaster to come and cheer him with bright, enlivening conversation; even Gerard, curiously enough, seemed to hold aloof. Under these circumstances it was only natural that his wife should renounce her walks and her studies, and devote herself entirely to his companionship. She now stayed with him morning, noon, and night. She never left him, except for a few minutes at a time. She would sit by him for hours together, and—what struck Mirabel as rather curious—would often keep her eyes fixed upon him with a strange, concentrated expression which made him feel ever so slightly uncomfortable. Sometimes she would take his hand and hold it in hers—still with the same steadfast look; and sometimes she would lay her hand upon his head—which gave him a sensation of cold, and made him shiver very curiously. He often wanted to ask her why she did these things, and what made her look at him with that disconcerting gaze; but somehow, when on the point of doing so, he was kept back by something like a sense of shame—shame at the thought of giving way to what could be nothing more than the morbid fancies of a sick man. Was she not his wife? Was she not devoting herself to him, sacrificing all her own enjoyments to his welfare? Why should he run the risk of paining her by appearing harassed by her affectionate solicitude?

He felt himself growing—ever so slightly—weaker. No doubt the chilly, rainy weather, and the deprivation of those hours spent in the open air, would account for that; and of course the weaker he felt the more dependent he became on Julia, and the more conscious of her strength. Not that she used it tyrannously; she was always kind enough, in her cold, unimpassioned way; but he knew

instinctively that in any case in which there was the slightest difference in their respective wishes, however ready she might appear to accede to his, it was always hers that prevailed. Once or twice, too, a very strange thing happened. It seemed to him that there was something in his wife's eyes that made him drowsy. And the drowsiness he felt was not that calm, luxurious sensation which springs from healthy fatigue; it was rather an unaccountable propensity to close his eyes notwithstanding his own will, a propensity against which it was painful for him to struggle. On one occasion he became thoroughly alarmed. He suddenly found himself lying back in his easy-chair by the fireside without any recollection of how he came there. His memory was a complete blank. Whether he had dropped off to sleep and woke up again, or whether he had been awake all the time, and was now suffering from a momentary confusion of thought arising from physical weakness, he could not tell. All he knew was that something puzzling had happened, and that his wife was standing by his side.

"What is it, Julie? Where have I been?" he asked, confusedly.

"Been? Why, you've been here," she replied, sitting down.

"Have you had a pleasant nap?"

"Nap! I haven't been to sleep, have I?" he exclaimed.

"You've been sleeping beautifully," said his wife.

Mirabel was silent for a minute. "But," he said, "I can't have been asleep. I don't remember going to sleep. I never felt sleepy at all. I don't feel, now, like a man that has just woke up. All I know is that I'm awake now, and don't remember anything. I feel as if I had just come into existence from a state of nothingness. Bah! It is horrible! horrible!"

"You slept soundly," replied his wife, with a slight smile curving her lips, "and you have woke up suddenly. That is quite sufficient to account for it all. Don't you feel better for the rest?"

"No," said Mirabel, fretfully. "I feel weak and restless."

This occurred when Lancaster had been gone nearly a week. Two days afterwards Gerard called. It had been a considerable effort to him to remain away so long, especially as he felt sure that Mirabel would like to see him; but he was determined to make an honest struggle against the temptation that was assailing him, and he had, too, an uneasy consciousness that his visits, under the circumstances, were dishonorable. What constituted the fascination of this woman? She was not a lovable creature. She was handsome, certainly, but her beauty was of that cold, bright, hard quality

which is of all others least calculated to excite tenderness. Perhaps it was that her character presented just those points and features in which Gerard himself was so conspicuously lacking; he found in her that which he did not possess; she was original, unlike other women; and she thus appealed to his imagination more, perhaps, than to his heart. This distinction, however, Gerard failed to make, and he swore to himself that he could never love another woman as he loved her.

She met him in the hall, and, contrary to her usual practice, took him into an unoccupied room instead of that in which her husband was. "We haven't seen you for some days," she said, motioning him to a seat.

"No," replied Gerard, hesitatingly. "I have been—rather busy. How is Mirabel getting on?"

"He has been a little weak for the last day or two," she said, carelessly. "This change in the weather is trying him, I fancy; he hasn't been able to get out, and of course that makes a difference."

"I am so sorry," said Gerard; "I ought to have come before. I'm afraid you're feeling the confinement to the house, too; you must let me relieve you a bit every now and then."

"You are very good," said Madame Mirabel; "but really I am quite equal to all I have to do. My place is with my husband, and I do not care to leave him just now. He is nervous and unstrung, somehow, and seems to depend on me a good deal."

"Is he really worse?" exclaimed Gerard, surprised.

"I shouldn't say that, exactly," she replied; "of course he fluctuates, and I thought he seemed rather weaker this morning than he has been for some time past."

"Have you written to Lancaster about him?" asked Gerard.

"I have no address," she said; "I haven't heard from Dr. Lancaster yet. I expect to hear soon, though; and if Gaston shows no signs of improvement in a day or two I shall call in Dr. Charlton."

"I suppose I may see him," observed Gerard.

Madame Mirabel hesitated. "I think he would like to see you very much," she answered, "but I am not quite sure whether it would be prudent. He is apt to get so excited; another sign of weakness, I'm afraid."

"I do hope and trust you are not wearing yourself out," said Gerard, anxiously. "Do let me come and sit with him sometimes, if only that you may get a little air and exercise."

"Why should you sacrifice yourself for me?" she said, a soft look coming into her blue eyes.

"I could not if I tried," he answered, fervently; "nothing—nothing in the wide world would be a sacrifice if done for your sake. You know it well enough; why do you talk to me like that?"

It was just those rare, brief gleams of tenderness, contrasting so exquisitely with her usual calm reserve, which inflamed poor Gerard's heart almost fatally. His voice trembled with emotion as he spoke. She, on her side, leaned forward in her low chair, and gazed straight into his eyes with a thoughtful, half-inquiring expression.

"Gerard!" suddenly exclaimed a voice.

Both started; and, looking up, saw Mirabel standing in the doorway. The change in his appearance was marked; and his haggard, eager face, dishevelled hair, and long, gray dressing-gown startled Gerard almost as though he had seen a ghost.

"Gaston, go back to your room this minute!" cried his wife, rising hastily. "How imprudent of you—you'll catch your death of cold?"

Mirabel hesitated; he looked for a moment as though he almost feared her. Then he turned to Gerard and smiled.

"Why have you not been before?" he asked, excitedly. "I have not seen you for a week. Never mind! You are here now, and that is well. It makes me feel better already. Come, my friend, come with me into the next room. It is cold here. Come, and we will have a nice long chat."

"You're not looking as well as I should like to see you," said Gerard, as they crossed the hall together.

"I do not know—I do not know what it is," answered Mirabel, sinking into his chair. "I feel weak, somehow; I want the good Lancaster with me again." He paused; then, hearing Madame Mirabel's step ascending the staircase, said, half-suspiciously:

"How long have you been here? Why did you not come in to me at once?"

"Madame Mirabel took me into the other room," replied Gerard. "She seemed almost afraid you were not well enough to see me to-day."

"She said that?" retorted Mirabel, with a quick raising of the eyebrows. "And what else did she say? Tell me all about it; come!"

"Nothing, I assure you," said the other. "Only that you had seemed a little weaker for the last day or two, in consequence of the weather I suppose. How are you feeling yourself?"

"I hardly know," said Mirabel; "my spirits seem all to have left me. I suppose I am rather weaker—I must be—for I have strange feelings I cannot describe. There is one most distressing sensation that I am ashamed to tell you. Bah! it is only that I am morbid. But—no, I cannot say it. It is too monstrous. I should deserve to be hanged for it, only that I know it is because I am so weak."

"Never mind; tell me," said Gerard, encouragingly.

"*I am afraid of my wife,*" whispered Mirabel.

Gerard did the very best thing possible under the circumstances. He broke into ringing laughter. "Why, Mirabel," he exclaimed, "I wouldn't have believed it of you! Nonsense; you must get over that. It's too absurd altogether. You're hipped, that's all; you miss Lancaster, and you miss the sunshine and the open air, and I'm afraid you've missed me."

"Yes, yes; you are right, you are quite right," assented the other, eagerly. "Of course I know that myself. Julie is the best of wives. It is only because I am not well; sick men's fancies are not to be trusted—they are wild, ridiculous, insane! There, we will not say any more about it. What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

The two were soon chatting pleasantly together upon indifferent subjects, Mirabel throwing himself into the conversation with almost feverish interest. Once or twice Gerard thought he heard a stealthy footstep in the hall, and whenever this occurred Mirabel cast a quick, anxious glance in the direction of the door—or Gerard fancied so. They were left undisturbed, however, for about twenty minutes, during which time Mirabel seemed almost like his old self again. The hunted look which had so struck Gerard passed away, and the old cheerfulness once more lighted up his face. Then the door opened, and his wife came in.

"It is still drizzling," she said, as she moved towards them.

"The weather is certainly most detestable," answered Gerard.

"I think the wind has changed," she continued.

"Is it in the east?" asked Mirabel. "I know it is; I feel it, and it makes me shiver."

"You look tired," said his wife. And certainly there was a look of weariness about him which had not been noticeable while he

and Gerard were alone together. "Don't you feel any inclination for a doze?"

"No, no, not in the least," he replied, hastily.

"I think you do," she said, in a firm, quiet tone.

He threw himself back in his chair, trying to avoid his wife's eye. "I tell you no," he repeated, with a sort of fretful impatience. "I have a horror of going to sleep in the daytime; it always makes me worse."

"My dear Gaston," said Madame Mirabel, "if you will excite yourself in this way I shall have to call in Dr. Charlton."

"I will not see him," exclaimed the invalid. "I want Lancaster again; I don't want any of your Charltons. Gerard does me more good than anybody—and I like to have him come. But a stranger I cannot bear to see."

"Very well, then," rejoined his wife, as though to humor him; "only you must be reasonable, you know, and do what I tell you. It is all nonsense to say that a nap in the afternoon does you harm; you need it, and your eyes are almost closing now."

Gerard here rose and prepared to go. Mirabel, whose movements were suggestive of growing languor, made a feeble effort to restrain him, but was forced to content himself with the promise of another visit shortly, while Madame Mirabel seemed relieved at his departure. The rain was still falling, and as he tramped homeward over the wide moor he lapsed into rather deep and anxious thought. It seemed undeniable to him that his friend's progress towards recovery had received a check. And not only was his health less satisfactory; a painful change had come over his mind. Before, when he was supposed to be dying, his spirits were always good, his cheerfulness indomitable; now, although his physical condition was still better than it had been then, even allowing for this curious relapse, he was anxious, fretful, nervous, and full of the most shocking fancies. Afraid of his wife! What clearer proof could there be of impending mental trouble? Afraid of that strong, beautiful, devoted woman, every glance of whose eye, every pressure of whose hand, conveyed a thrill of ecstasy to the favored recipient—surely, a man must be ill indeed to take up with such delusions. That hunted look—that feverish anxiety for a friendly face—that rebelliousness against her wise suggestion that a little sleep would refresh and strengthen him—all convinced Gerard that poor Mirabel's disorder had taken a new turn, and that for both his sake and

his wife's it was most desirable that the absence of Dr. Lancaster should be speedily brought to a close.

His conviction would probably have been deepened could he have witnessed the scene that took place in Dr. Mirabel's bedroom that night. It was wild weather outside; the wind swept tumultuously over the broad expanse of heath, and dashed the rain ever and anon against the window-panes with a fierce, pattering noise like that of a shower of grape-shot. The fire burned red and sullen between the bars, leaving the room in semi-darkness; on the sofa lay the sick man, straight and supine, and over him stood his wife. Was he asleep? Scarcely; for every now and then he spoke and tried apparently to move; and even when he lay quite still and silent he did not look as though he were sleeping—rather, indeed, as though he were actually dead. His arms rested against his sides, and his white, thin hands every now and then closed and unclosed themselves with a nervous tremor suggestive of some inward struggle; his eyes were shut, but there was a quivering motion in the eyelids which told of conflict, agony, resistance to some overpowering influence or impulse from without.

The silence, which had lasted for about ten minutes, was now broken. It was his wife who spoke.

"Gaston," she said, "are you asleep?"

He breathed heavily, and made a violent effort to open his eyes.

"Gaston, look at me," she continued.

A contortion passed over his features, accompanied by a convulsive movement of the limbs.

"Gaston," she repeated, in a firm tone.

"Let me go!" he cried, suddenly. "You suffocate me—you are killing me by inches! Ah, it is horrible, horrible—you send me into the blackness and darkness where it is all nothing—you torture me with fright! Go, I tell you, go—leave me alone! Ah, *pour l'amour de Dieu, pour l'amour du bon Dieu!*"

His eyes were open wide enough now, and glared at her with a look of that intense, helpless horror only seen in those who are still under the influence of some frightful nightmare.

"You must not say such things as that," said Madame Mirabel, laying her cold right hand upon his forehead. "You are very ill. You must do whatever I tell you. When I order you to go to sleep you must do so. Come, shut your eyes at once."

"No! no!" he cried, piteously. "I want Lancaster—he would save me. *Oh, mon Dieu*, when will the good Lancaster come back?"

"Dr. Lancaster never did you any good," replied his wife. "It was all your fancy. He could not do you any good if he were here now. You must not think about him any more."

She placed his head gently but firmly upon the cushions again, while he gazed at her like a dumb animal at bay. Then she stroked his forehead. Gradually the terrified look died out, and was succeeded by an expression of submissiveness almost amounting to torpor.

"Now, listen to me," she resumed. "You are alone with me now, and you depend upon me for everything."

He only moaned.

"You do not want to see Dr. Lancaster any more; he cannot do anything for you."

A faint, fluttering sigh escaped him, and his hands fell lifelessly on either side.

"You have implicit confidence in me; you will do everything I tell you; you cannot live without me; you want me to be with you till you die."

He lay there, passive as a corpse, and made no answer.

"Do you hear me, Gaston?" said his wife.

"I hear you," he said, like a man talking in his sleep.

"You want me to stay with you till you die," she repeated, steadily. "Say it!"

"I want you to stay with me till I die," he murmured.

"That is right. And now you are to go to sleep."

She passed her hand once more over his eyes. He was breathing stertorously, and his mouth twitched once or twice. Then he relapsed into complete unconsciousness, and she stood watching him closely for a minute or two; but he never stirred, and the expression of her face relaxed.

"I think that will do for to-night," she said, as she moved quietly to the fire-place. "Half-past eleven—he shall sleep till about ten in the morning. It's tiresome work; however, it has to be done, so there's no use worrying over it."

Then she began slowly to undress, put on a comfortable *peignoir*, and sat down in front of the fire, gazing into its red hollows thoughtfully. There was no sound from the sofa. The rain still fell, but the wind appeared to have dropped, and everything was silent out of doors. She was the only watcher in that house.

"It's curious I have heard nothing yet," she murmured, resuming the thread of her meditations. "He must have got there days

ago. I wonder what he did when he discovered—Good heavens! Can he be on his way back?"

A warm flush suddenly suffused her face, and for a moment she looked disturbed—nay, actually alarmed.

"Well, whatever he did, I can do nothing more. It was a bold stroke—a wonderful inspiration. And yet how simple! Poor Gaston—I don't think he suffers much. He will have forgotten all about it when he wakes. I only wish I could keep that Palliser boy away from him. I foresee a little embarrassment from that youth."

Then a smile broke out. "To think of the foolish creature fancying himself in love with me! Still, it gives me a hold over him; a weakness of that sort is always a weapon in one's hand. Well, it's growing late. I think I'll go to bed."

She threw a rug over her husband's feet and legs; looked searchingly at him for a few minutes, much as an experimenter might look at the materials he had prepared for the observation of some interesting scientific process, to see that the conditions continued favorable; then raked the fire together, and stepped composedly between the sheets. Some people think that there is no better provocative of sleep than a good conscience. Madame Mirabel soon slept as soundly and as peacefully as an infant; but whether that was due to an untroubled moral sense, or to the absence of any moral sense at all, is a question we need not dwell upon at present. We may be very sure that Madame Mirabel herself never vexed her head about the matter.

The next morning Mirabel awoke much weaker. He was calm, however, and did not seem to have any recollection of what had passed during the night, beyond a confused sense of some vaguely distressing dream. His wife tended him with her usual jealous care.

In the afternoon she wrote two letters. One was to Gerard, to the effect that, as she was getting rather uneasy about her husband's increasing weakness, she had decided to ask Dr. Charlton to come and look at him. The other was to Dr. Charlton himself.

And now the entire neighborhood began to sympathize with her. Her constancy and devotion under this new trial were pronounced worthy of all praise, all sympathy. The general impression was that Dr. Mirabel's relapse had set in before the departure of Dr. Lancaster, and it was therefore no more than natural that the latter should incur a certain amount of censure. Mrs. Palliser

averred that she had never heard anything like it since she was born, while her husband gave utterance to the oracular opinion that the whole thing looked very queer; he supposed that Lancaster knew what he was about, but for his part he thought such conduct stood very much in need of explanation. All this distressed Gerard considerably. He was now getting seriously anxious about Mirabel, and although, knowing the circumstances of Lancaster's departure, he defended the absent man, he wondered greatly how it was that nothing had yet been heard from him. Never had he known a doctor more able, more assiduous, more conscientious in the treatment of his patients; the fact of his absence was unfortunate, merely, considering the turn that things had taken, but what was to be said of his long silence? Charlton, who was a respectable but somewhat talkative man, did much to foment public interest in the affair. The patient, he told everybody, seemed dying of weakness. It was no longer, apparently, a case of tuberculosis. It was rather a general prostration, a failure of the vital powers, a creeping, insidious decay of the entire system, which baffled all human skill. Of course it would be most satisfactory if Lancaster could be recalled, but personally he did not believe that Lancaster or anybody else would be able to relieve the sufferer. Besides, who could do more for him than his practical, cool-headed, and admirably devoted wife? Even the servants, who idolized Mirabel and treated their mistress with the coldest civility and respect, could not withhold their admiration of her unwearied goodness to him. And thus it was that Madame Mirabel soon became quite popular, while Lancaster was blamed for his indifference, and Mirabel himself, secluded from the public gaze, lay dying slowly in secret.

CHAPTER XIV

MADAME MIRABEL SEEKS ADVICE

It was at breakfast-time, two or three days later, that Madame Mirabel received her long-expected letter from Dr. Lancaster. A gleam of excitement came into her eyes as she found it lying beside her plate, and she opened it with a beating heart. As she read it, however, her agitation decreased, and, putting it down with an expression of satisfaction and relief, she drank her coffee eagerly.

"So far so good," she remarked, comfortably. "Nothing could have turned out better." A couple of fine fresh eggs, and a beautiful pink rasher grilled to a turn, seemed to complete her contentment, and she ate and drank with unusual relish. She was by no means a woman who despised the luxuries of the table, but a healthy creature with a strong will, an excellent digestion, and a capital appetite which she never had any scruples in gratifying; and on this particular morning she seemed to enjoy her breakfast hugely. Then she took up the letter and glanced over it once more.

"Monday evening!" she exclaimed, as her eye fell upon the date. "To-day is Saturday. What in the world can have happened? Why has it been so long upon the road?"

She turned over the envelope and examined the postmark. It had been posted at Bellinzona.

A burst of delighted laughter came from her beautiful lips. "Bellinzona" she cried under her breath. "How like him—to write a letter, put it in his pocket, forget all about it, and then find it by accident three days afterwards! It almost tempts one to believe in an overruling Providence."

Her explanation of the delay was, we are bound to confess, the true one. Lancaster had hastily slipped the letter into his inner breast-pocket, intending to post it when he went out after breakfast the day succeeding his arrival; but, as we know, his mind was then entirely taken up with the problem of Dr. Bretschneider's non-

ance, and he forgot all about the letter from that moment. He discovered it, in fact, when approaching the frontier two days afterwards, and was terribly annoyed at his own carelessness; he had no reason to anticipate any serious consequences from the oversight, and contented himself with posting it at the next

Madame Mirabel waited in all that morning to see whether George would call. He had only been once since the last occasion when he called, and had not been allowed to see Mirabel for more than a few moments. Finding he did not appear, she took a light lunch at past one, and then dressed herself in a very quiet walking-dress, selecting the darkest colors she possessed. There was a great deal of art exercised in her toilet on this occasion, admirably adapted for the purpose that she had in hand. All the aggressive coquetry which so irritated most of her neighbors disappeared almost by magic. Nothing could have been plainer, simpler, or more reserved than her appearance; even the bright color seemed to have faded from her cheeks, and she looked almost pathetically

After giving a few orders to one of the servants, she left the house, walking slowly in the direction of the Pallisers'. A slight change had taken place in the weather, and the day, though somewhat chilly, was dry and not unpleasant. After her long confinement to the sick-room the fresh air and exercise she was now enjoying were delightful, and for a moment she felt almost tempted to prolong her walk. But she was not a woman to let pleasure interfere with business.

Mr. Palliser was sitting alone by the fireside when Madame Mirabel was announced, reading a religious novel. The good lady possessed a decided weakness for this form of literature; it gratified her imagination and her instinctive piety at the same time. She put down her book, however, as her visitor was shown in, and greeted her with something like effusiveness.

"Dear Madame Mirabel, I am quite delighted to see you," she said, as the slim, plainly-clad form of that lady advanced gracefully into the room. "Take this low chair near the fire; it's a cold day, though I dare say you don't feel it quite so much as I do—I have a wretched circulation. I've been so anxious about you, and I should have come and seen you, only as I dare say you have had our own troubles too, and my husband and I have been laid up with colds."

"Oh, thank you—I know how good you are," replied Madame Mirabel, sinking into the seat assigned her. "Yes, I suppose most people have had colds lately—the weather has really been most trying. I hope you and Mr. Palliser are better?"

"Yes—rather better, thank you," replied Mrs. Palliser, "though it is very difficult to shake off these little ailments when one comes to our time of life. And then, you know, we've been so dreadfully upset lately. You must have heard, of course, about poor dear old Mrs. Palliser. I think you met her here once, didn't you? It was a terrible shock to us all."

"Ah yes, indeed," murmured Madame Mirabel, softly. "It must have been most distressing. What a sprightly, clever old lady she was! I remember being greatly struck with her. How has she been since?"

"Oh, there's very little change," answered Mrs. Palliser, shaking her head. "She seems very feeble, and there is no hope that she will ever be permanently better. Her poor mind has completely gone. Still, she is quite quiet, I'm thankful to say, and doesn't talk in the frightful way she did at first. I can't tell you what it was like! I assure you, dear Madame Mirabel, the day she was taken—the day she lost her reason, you know—she made my blood run cold. I had never seen anything like it before, and it made me feel as though I were going mad myself."

"I can quite understand that, and I can't tell you how much I sympathized with you when I heard of it," said Madame Mirabel. "Still, so long as she doesn't suffer, there is cause for thankfulness. I often think that there are scarcely any troubles which are wholly without alleviations, if one only knows where to look for them."

"Most true—most true indeed," assented Mrs. Palliser, fervently. Then she thought to herself, "How cruelly I must have misjudged this poor woman! Evidently she has a fund of goodness in her, and her own heavy troubles have been the blessed means of bringing it all out."

Just then the door opened, and Mr. Palliser came in. He looked worn and anxious, but brightened visibly at the sight of Madame Mirabel, to whom he extended a very courteous and hearty welcome.

"And what's all this we hear about your husband?" he asked in his kind, genial way, as he sat down. "What's the reason that Lancaster went away so suddenly, and how is it he never writes?"

Madame Mirabel hesitated a moment. "The fact is, dear Mr. Palliser," she said at last, "I have taken a very great liberty with you both. But you have always been so kind to me—and I am so sorely in need of advice just now—that—that I thought I couldn't do better than come—"

"My dear lady," exclaimed the good gentleman, "don't talk nonsense about taking a liberty, pray. We've often thought about you, and spoken of you, and wondered whether we couldn't help you in any way, but we never knew exactly how. What is the trouble? Tell us all about it, and let's see if something can't be done."

Thus urged, Madame Mirabel coughed a little, looked nervously at the fire, and then prepared to speak. "I was sure you would be kind to me," she said, with a faint smile upon her lips, "and it will be a great comfort to me to tell you all about it. I am afraid that poor Dr. Lancaster has come in for a good deal of censure lately. But honestly I don't think he deserves it. He was summoned to a medical conference at Lucerne, you know, and really he could scarcely help himself. And Gaston—my husband—was so much better, and seemed to be gaining strength so steadily, that there appeared no solid reason why Dr. Lancaster shouldn't go. I'm convinced he would never have gone if he had thought there was the slightest risk."

"H'm," muttered Mr. Palliser, dubiously.

"I know it struck *me* as being the most extraordinary thing I had ever heard of in my life," remarked his wife.

"No, I think all that was a misapprehension," said Madame Mirabel, very gently. "I am sure that much that has been said about him is unjust. However, a few days after his departure my husband seemed not quite so well. His appetite fell off, and he got weaker, and once or twice he complained of distressing dreams; and of course all this made me very anxious. At last I decided upon calling in Dr. Charlton; very reluctantly, I confess, because poor Gaston opposed the idea so strongly—you know what sick men's fancies are, don't you, dear Mrs. Palliser? but I judged it best eventually, and he has attended him ever since last Wednesday, though I am very much afraid he has not done him any good."

"How sad, to be sure! Oh, you poor thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, sympathetically.

"But why didn't you write to Lancaster?" asked her husband.

"I am just coming to that," replied Madame Mirabel, in the same low tones. "You must remember that for several days after Gaston had begun to get weaker I was not seriously alarmed. I put it down to the break-up of the weather, and the natural fluctuations which occur in cases such as his. Eventually I did get anxious, and wanted to write; but most unfortunately I had no address, and was forced to wait until I heard from Dr. Lancaster himself. You may conceive my state of mind! Day after day passed, and I got no letter. Well—"

"It's perfectly scandalous! scandalous!" interrupted Mr. Palliser, in an indignant burst.

"I never heard of such abominable behavior since I was born!" chimed in his wife.

"Indeed, indeed you are mistaken," said Madame Mirabel, earnestly. "Of course *I* thought it was very unaccountable at first; but it turns out that we have all been the victims of circumstances. I heard from Dr. Lancaster this morning, and I've brought the letter for you to see. He was detained for three days in Paris by indisposition, and when he arrived at Lucerne he was unable to find the friend he had gone to visit—in fact, there seems to have been some most unfortunate accident, or misunderstanding, which still remains to be explained. Then he wrote to me, but apparently forgot to post the letter! And now," she added with a slight but most effective tremor in her voice, "he has started for Italy. What in the world am I to do?"

By this time she had taken Lancaster's letter from her pocket, and was holding it out to Mr. Palliser. The good gentleman, looking very stern, knitted his brows into a judicial frown, and, adjusting his eye-glasses, read it aloud for the benefit of his wife. "H'm!" he muttered. "It certainly is a most unlucky business, and I can't think that Lancaster is entirely devoid of blame. How does it strike you?"—turning to Mrs. Palliser.

"It is all a most terrible muddle," she replied, shaking her head from side to side despairingly. "I think, in the first place, he should have written to you from Paris; I think it was abominably careless of him not to have posted his letter at once when he did write; and I think he had no business to go flying off to Milan like that. It seems to me that a medical man's proper place is with his patients; he has no right to put himself out of their reach as Dr. Lancaster has done. And then what's all this about not being able to find the man who telegraphed to him?"

"Aye, what about that?" put in Mr. Palliser. "I confess I don't understand it; it's a queer business altogether—a mighty queer business. If the other man wasn't to be found, why didn't he come back at once?"

"I suppose he never dreamt he would be wanted," replied Madame Mirabel, sadly. "Of course it is almost inexplicable—I mean, that Dr. Bretschneider should have taken the trouble to summon him to Lucerne by wire, and then never be there to meet him. And you see he isn't even sure that he may find him in Milan. As you say, it is a terrible muddle; and really I am quite uncertain what I ought to do."

"Telegraph for him at once!" exclaimed Mr. Palliser.

"Without losing another moment!" cried his wife.

"I did think of that," said Madame Mirabel, nervously, "but when it came to the point my courage failed. It seemed to me such a responsibility—suddenly to summon a professional man back from the south of Europe, where he has gone on a scientific mission, on what after all *may* be insufficient grounds. I have done everything he told me to—even called in Dr. Charlton—and—well, I don't know what more I can do, except write to him, of course. One trouble is that Gaston doesn't like Dr. Charlton, and won't believe that he can do him any good."

"I certainly think Lancaster should be communicated with somehow," remarked Mr. Palliser.

"I wish *I* could get hold of him for a moment," exclaimed his wife.

"Of course," resumed the worthy gentleman, "I quite enter into your feelings about upsetting all his plans, and so on, but still, you know, when it's a question of life and death—"

"Life and death!" cried Madame Mirabel, with a start that would have increased the reputation of Sarah Bernhardt. The sudden look of horrified amazement in her wonderful blue eyes, the cry from her parted, tremulous lips, the instinctive clasping of her hands as she turned towards the speaker and threw her head ever so slightly back, were all perfect. Art could go no higher; the whole thing was a flash of the very purest genius.

"We thought—we heard, you know, dear Madame Mirabel," began Mrs. Palliser, hesitatingly.

"Oh, don't say so, don't say so, I entreat you!" she exclaimed in piteous tones. "It is not so bad as that—indeed it isn't; if there were really any danger, I am sure I should have found it

out. No, I don't think I could have been deceived. Gaston is weaker, I know, and I have been very anxious about him; but he is not dying—he can't be—it would be too dreadful if he were!”

“H'm!” said Mr. Palliser once more. “Well, then, I tell you what my advice is. See Charlton, and get him to write to Lancaster at once; and write yourself too. Tell him everything, and then leave the result with him. If, on getting your letter, he thinks his presence here imperatively necessary, you may be sure he'll come back without delay; if not, he'll tell you what to do yourself, and send fresh instructions to Charlton. So I think you may make your mind easy. What do *you* say?” turning for confirmation to his wife.

“You're perfectly right, Marmaduke,” replied that authority with a decided air. “I think you've hit on just the proper course. It is exactly what I should have suggested myself. I'm so glad you came and confided in us, Madame Mirabel; two heads are always better than one, aren't they? Oh, I am sure my husband is right. And now let's have some tea.”

“I am infinitely grateful to you,” said Madame Mirabel, with a faint smile which struck her warm-hearted hostess as pathetic in the extreme. “I will follow your instructions to the letter, and write to Dr. Lancaster this evening.”

Then, with unerring tact, she gradually led the conversation into other channels, sipping her tea with the prettiest possible air of revived confidence and ease. And truly she had reason to be satisfied. Everything had gone off to perfection. She had made firm friends of the Pallisers, she had told them her story with complete success, she had actually shown them Dr. Lancaster's own letter, she had procured from them the very advice she wanted, and she had made it impossible for the worst gossip in the place to criticise her on the ground either of neglecting her husband's interests or keeping her own difficulties a secret. Yes, she had done well, and she felt honestly pleased with herself. The only point in which she had failed—and always would fail—was in her inability to cry at will. Most women, of course, have the power, but this poor lady's lachrymal glands were obstinate, and refused to work; do what she would, she always found it impossible to force out that one big, bright drop which her artistic instincts told her was wanted as a finishing touch to her otherwise faultless impersonations, and she had been painfully conscious of her deficiency on this occasion. Yet in spite of this drawback, she had

achieved a signal triumph, and the pleasure the thought gave her lent an additional relish to her tea and toast.

"Your son has been so good to us," she said, as she played listlessly with her cup.

"Gerard? Dear boy!—well, I'm glad to hear it," said Mrs. Palliser. "Yes, I know he is with you a good deal."

"I wish I could get him something to do," muttered his father, with a preoccupied look. "It's high time he made a start."

"No doubt," returned Madame Mirabel, thoughtfully. "In what direction do you think he would find the most suitable opening?"

"Well, I scarcely know," answered Mr. Palliser. "I had a splendid thing in view for him some time ago—a position in which he would have made thousands of pounds a year; but that—er—is in abeyance for the present. He might do well upon the Stock Exchange, only things are so queer just now in the City. I should like him, if possible, to get appointed manager or secretary to some first-class company; I've a good many influential friends on Directorates and that sort of thing; or he might make his mark in diplomacy, or some other department of the government. But I can't see my way just now as clearly as I could wish."

Madame Mirabel opened her eyes rather wide at these somewhat magnificent aspirations, but contented herself with remarking that she thought he would do best in literature. Yes, no doubt, if he could only find a publisher who could give him good prices for his books," assented Mr. Palliser. "But I've no idea of the boy drudging as a sort of hack. He's got brains enough; what he wants is an opening, so as to make a comfortable income from the first."

Madame Mirabel murmured a sympathetic assent, and then produced that indescribable rustling sound by which ladies habitually intimate that they are about to make a move.

"Well, I must be going now," she said, beginning to draw on her gloves. "Give him my kind regards, will you, please? And again let me thank you for your infinite goodness to me to-day. You have taken the greatest load off my mind."

"We've done nothing—absolutely nothing," responded Mr. Palliser, genially. "A little friendly advice—that's all. Don't forget to let us know how matters are going with you."

"And anything else we can do for you, dear Madame Mirabel," added Mrs. Palliser, as she effusively shook hands. "Tell your dear husband how much we think of him, and how anxious we shall be to hear that he is better."

"You'll probably hear from Lancaster again before your own letter reaches him," said Mr. Palliser, as he accompanied her to the door. And then away she went.

"Rum start this, isn't it?" said the worthy gentleman, as he rejoined his wife in the drawing-room. "I don't understand Lancaster leaving everything at loose ends like that at all."

"I don't understand it either," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "There's something we haven't got to the bottom of in this business, you may depend upon it. And oh, my dear, I do think that we've misjudged that poor woman all along. How nice and simple she was to-day!—so different from what I've always imagined her. Just think what her anxiety must have been!"

"I don't think *I* was ever prejudiced against her, my dear," replied Mr. Palliser. "In fact, if I am not mistaken, it has generally fallen to my lot to defend her against other people's prejudices." Whereupon his wife picked up her shawl, which had fallen unheeded on the ground, poked the fire with somewhat unnecessary vigor, and was soon once more deep in her religious novel.

Madame Mirabel did not hurry home. The fresh air was so grateful to her that she prolonged her walk a little, and it was nearly five o'clock when she reached her house. All was quiet. Then she went up-stairs to her husband's room, and remained there for the best part of an hour. What she did there is not for us to say. No sound escaped through the locked door, and the servants were not inquisitive. About a quarter to six she came down again, and rang the bell.

"I shall want you to take a couple of letters to the post after dinner this evening, Susan," she said, opening her desk and arranging her writing materials.

"Yes, ma'am," said the servant.

"How has your master been this afternoon?" asked Madame Mirabel, in her usual impassive tones.

"Much the same, ma'am," replied the girl. "I went up once to see if he wanted anything, and he didn't take any notice of me."

"Was he asleep?" asked her mistress.

"I couldn't rightly say, ma'am," replied Susan. "His eyes were shut at first, but he opened them a minute or two afterwards, though he didn't look as if he saw me: there was a blind look about them, somehow."

"Ah!" said Madame Mirabel. "I am feeling very anxious about your master, Susan, and I'm going to write to Dr. Lancaster. I

should have written before, only I had no address until this morning."

"Oh, ma'am, I do wish the doctor would come back!" cried the girl, impulsively. "The master's never been the same since he went away. Is he likely to be back before long, do you know, ma'am?"

"We'll hope so; but at present he is in Italy," replied Madame Mirabel. "There, go and tell cook to get dinner ready as quickly as she can; I shall have finished my letters by the time she sends it up, and then you can take them to the post."

Exit Susan, with much sympathy and admiration for her mistress in her honest, unsuspecting heart. Madame Mirabel was not in the habit of speaking unnecessarily to the servants, and this unwonted confidence on her part had a great effect on Susan. Then she wrote to Dr. Lancaster as follows:

"GORSE COTTAGE, Saturday.

"DEAR DR. LANCASTER,—I was glad to get your letter this morning, as I had been hoping to hear from you for some days. It is very strange that you should have failed to find Dr. Bretschneider at Lucerne. What can be the reason? I can only hope that you have discovered his whereabouts ere this, and that the mystery which has been puzzling you is now cleared up.

"Gaston has not been as well as I could wish. He has no cough, but suffers from great prostration, as well as extreme lowness of spirits. This has made me very anxious, and I have often wished that you were not away. I have also been much annoyed at the exaggerated reports of his condition that have been spread by Dr. Charlton. I have not very much confidence in Dr. Charlton myself, for I am sure he does not understand the case; and I should feel much happier if you would write and let me know what I had better do. Perhaps you would send a line to Dr. Charlton too. Meantime I am asking him to let you know his own opinion; you can take it for what it is worth.

"When shall we see you back? I trust you are having a pleasant holiday, and—what I know would gratify you more than anything—that the great Mattei problem is in course of being solved.

"Gaston joins me in kindest regards.

"Ever yours sincerely,

JULIA MIRABEL."

"There," she said to herself, as she folded the letter, "I don't think that could be improved upon. Charlton's report will, of course, be very much more alarming; but I'll take care it doesn't

reach him too soon." Then she took another sheet of paper and prepared to write again.

"DEAR DR. CHARLTON,—I think it would be as well if, in view of my husband's continued weakness, you were to let Dr. Lancaster know your opinion of his case. I am aware, of course, that you do not believe Dr. Lancaster could do very much for him, and I trust you will not regard my proposal as evincing any want of confidence in your skill; but seeing that Dr. Lancaster had the case in hand for several months before he went away, I should feel more comfortable if he were kept *au courant* with it during his absence. His address is the Schweitzerhof, Lucerne.

"Saturday."

"Yours very truly,

JULIA MIRABEL.

"He's not likely to show *that* to Lancaster, anyhow," she said, with a slight smile, as she addressed the envelope. She took the two letters in her hand, and rang the bell; then a thought struck her, and she put the second one aside.

"Bring dinner, and then take this to the post," she said to the servant, giving her the letter for Lancaster. "Never mind about the other; to-morrow morning will be time enough for that."

She dined comfortably on a plate of strong, clear soup, a plump little bird beautifully toasted, a delicate batter-pudding with white-wine sauce, a cream cheese, and a few glasses of good claret; which helped to make her feel at peace with herself and all the world. People had told her once or twice that she really ought to keep up her strength, and she acted upon the advice. Then she put her feet upon the fender, and, taking up a French review, was soon absorbed in an article by an eminent scientist of the Nancy school upon the latest development of therapeutic hypnotism; a subject which appeared to have a singular fascination for her, for she read on and on with concentrated attention for nearly a couple of hours, making careful notes every now and then. At last the clock upon the mantel-piece chimed nine o'clock.

"I had better go up now, I suppose," she said, rising slowly from her chair. "I haven't done a bad day's work—but it isn't quite finished yet. How ghastly he looked this evening! It can scarcely last much longer, I should think."

Then she put out the gas, saw that the windows were securely fastened, stole cautiously up-stairs with silent footsteps, and entered the fatal room.

CHAPTER XV

VICTORY

GERARD was both surprised and pleased to hear, at dinner that evening, that Madame Mirabel had called; still more to find that she had created so favorable an impression upon his mother. He looked, however, much concerned on learning how matters stood respecting Dr. Lancaster. He was far from blaming the doctor for neglect or carelessness, seeing at once that the present difficulty had been brought about by circumstances beyond foresight or control; at the same time he fully recognized the gravity of the actual position, and felt more than ever convinced that Lancaster's immediate return was an affair of the most urgent necessity.

"Yes, indeed, we must all feel that," said Mrs. Palliser; "and yet, though of course poor Madame Mirabel is most cruelly anxious, she does not seem to expect any immediate danger. You saw how startled and horrified she was, Marmaduke, when you spoke of it as a question of life and death."

"I'm almost afraid she doesn't realize how ill Mirabel is," observed Gerard.

"What was he like when you saw him last?" inquired Mr. Palliser.

"I only saw him for a minute or two," replied Gerard, moodily. "And he looked horrible. His face was white and drawn, his nose pinched, and his eyes—well, I can scarcely describe them—fixed and hollow, with an expression in them that reminded me of a dog being vivisected under curare—that drug, you know, which prevents people crying out. I didn't like the look of him at all, I can tell you."

"My dear Gerard!" exclaimed his mother. "What a dreadful thing!"

"Did he speak to you?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"He tried to," answered Gerard, "but I couldn't make out what he said. He seemed either to be wandering, or else not to have the power of pronouncing the words he wanted to. I think he recognized me."

"Do you mean to say he's in such a state as *that*?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, horrified.

"He was when I saw him," said Gerard, "and his wife told me it was the effect of some sleeping-draught that Charlton was giving him, and would soon pass away. But I tell you that his appearance gave me a turn that I sha'n't soon forget."

"What an awful thing for that poor woman!" cried Mrs. Palliser.

"I believe the truth is that Charlton's making a fatal mess of the whole case," said her husband. "I don't believe he understands it one bit."

"The wonder to me is that Madame Mirabel keeps up as she does," said Mrs. Palliser. "I should have broken down long ago, I'm sure."

"It's all so sudden," remarked Gerard, knitting his brows. "The man's whole system seems to have collapsed. He'd been just a trifle under the weather for a day or two before Lancaster left—at least, so it struck me—in consequence of the sudden change, I fancy; and ever since then he's been going downhill with the most frightful rapidity. In fact, as I said just now, I don't believe his wife has any idea how ill he really is."

"It is perfectly unaccountable!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "Do, dear Gerard, go and inquire after him to-morrow or on Monday. I sha'n't be happy till I hear that there's some chance of Dr. Lancaster coming back; I don't know why, but I've a sort of instinctive feeling that he is the only man who can save that poor creature's life—he seemed to do such wonders for him as long as he was here."

Gerard promised readily enough, and decided to walk over the following afternoon. The day, however, turned out wet, and about three o'clock the rain descended in such floods that it was impossible for any one to venture out-of-doors. A storm of wind, too, arose, which created immense havoc among the firs—no uncommon occurrence upon the breezy uplands of that neighborhood—and the projected visit had to be given up. On Monday there was a lull; and Gerard took immediate advantage of it.

He reached Gorse Cottage about eleven o'clock, and inquired for Madame Mirabel. Again she met him in the hall; again she took him into an unoccupied room where there was no fire.

"I am glad you have called," she said, without asking him, however, to be seated. "You know I went to see your parents the day

before yesterday; I can't tell you how kind they were to me. I suppose they told you everything."

"About Lancaster, you mean?" said Gerard.

"Yes," assented Madame Mirabel. "Well, I've just had another letter from him, written at Milan—you know he went to Milan to see if he could find this Bretschneider person who seems to have behaved so strangely. He very soon discovered the hotel where he had been staying, and was told that just ten days previously he had left for Bologna, giving directions that any letters which came for him were to be forwarded to the address of a Dr. Semenza—one of the surgeons, evidently, who were to have taken part in this conference. And so, now, off he's gone again, and of course there's no knowing when he will come back."

"That's bad," said Gerard, looking much concerned. "You had written to him before, hadn't you?"

"Oh yes—I wrote on Saturday night, as soon as I got his first letter," she replied. "I addressed it to Lucerne."

"I know what I should do," said Gerard, after a moment's thought. "I should telegraph to him at once."

Madame Mirabel knitted her brows. "Your father suggested that," she said; "but afterwards he seemed to think it would be rather too great a responsibility to call him back from such a distance without the most urgent necessity. I don't quite know what I ought to do. You see, I have written to him—and Dr. Charlton has written, too—at least, I've asked him to, and no doubt he will; but if you really think it would be better to telegraph—"

"I do indeed, if only for your own sake," interrupted Gerard. "You have borne up wonderfully hitherto, but I'm sure you won't be able to stand the strain much longer. Send him a wire now—I'll take it to the telegraph-office on my way back."

"You are kindness itself," said Madame Mirabel, with a faint, pathetic smile. "Well, I'll tell you what; I expect Dr. Charlton will be here this afternoon, and I'll ask him what he thinks. If he advises me to recall Dr. Lancaster, I will do so. After all, it might be the wiser plan."

"I am sure of it," said Gerard, earnestly.

"Yes," she said. "And now I must go up to my husband. You'll give my kindest regards to your father and mother, won't you?"

"Certainly," he replied. "I think they'll be glad to hear that you have decided to telegraph. Is there any change?"

Madame Mirabel shook her head. "No—he is still lamentably weak, and passes all the time in a sort of doze. Really it looks as if what Dr. Lancaster always said was true—that vitality is subject to tides. The flood set in some weeks ago, and he recovered his strength amazingly; now the ebb has come, and what the end of it will be I don't know, I can only hope. Dr. Lancaster himself used to say that *he* had done nothing—it was simply a natural process independent of external influences, so perhaps he wouldn't be able to do anything even if he did come back."

Then Gerard took his leave, and comforted the anxieties of his good parents with the assurance that Madame Mirabel had virtually made up her mind to summon Lancaster at once. As soon as his back was turned, she went slowly and thoughtfully up-stairs and entered her husband's room.

"I knew I should have some trouble with that Palliser boy," she said to herself. "It may be necessary to telegraph, after all; it would scarcely do to stand out altogether. I wonder how soon it would be *safe*?"

She bent over the prostrate form of the once bright, happy Mirabel—now a helpless, tortured, dying man. She put her ear to his heart, and listened critically to its throbs; she felt his irregular and feeble pulse, and looked into his dreadful eyes, and noted the faint, convulsive twitching of his thin hands. "I almost think I might venture," she whispered, softly. "Another day of this, and then—why, that would make at least three days before he could arrive—I almost think I might!"

She sat down on a large rocking-chair near the bed, and began to rock herself gently to and fro. "I'm not at all sure," she continued, reflectively, "that it wouldn't be the wiser plan. I don't believe it *would* do, now I come to think of it, for him to die before Lancaster comes back. He has sunk so much more rapidly than I calculated. I don't believe that any human power could now call him back to life."

A strange sound—half moan, half croak—came from the bed. She rose, and put her face close to his.

"Am I dead yet?" he gasped, in a hoarse whisper.

"Not yet; you are dying," she answered.

He made a feeble effort to twist his head farther away from her, with a look of agony. Very slowly, very gently, she laid her hand upon his eyes, and closed them. He made no further sound, but lay as rigid and as motionless and as insensible as

though the release had actually come. And then she went downstairs.

That evening she sent a little note to Mrs. Palliser. Dr. Charlton had called during the afternoon, she said, and she had asked him whether it would be any use to telegraph to Dr. Lancaster as proposed. The result, however, had been most unfortunate. It might have been her fancy—she was rather overwrought, so perhaps was a little hypersensitive—but it did seem to her as though Dr. Charlton was just a trifle affronted at the suggestion; he had said that of course she must do as she pleased, but that he for one did not believe that Dr. Lancaster or anybody else could do anything for Gaston at all! It seemed such a cruel thing to say; but perhaps it was only a little outburst of professional jealousy—Madame Mirabel hoped that it was no more than that; however, she was now convinced that Charlton was no longer to be trusted, and she had therefore decided to telegraph to Dr. Lancaster at once.

"Thank God!" exclaimed good Mrs. Palliser, as she folded up the letter. "She has done a wise thing at last. I only hope to mercy that he won't lose any time."

People often complain, when suffering from suspense, of the extreme slowness with which time passes. It is only, however, where the expected event is certain, or almost certain, to happen at a definite day or hour that the intervening period seems so unduly and so abnormally prolonged. In cases where such an event—the arrival, say, of a person anxiously and ardently awaited—may take place any moment, and yet where the moments pass, and then the hours, and afterwards perhaps the days, and still he never comes—with what cruel rapidity time flies! Eleven o'clock already? He should have been here at nine. Half-past eleven? It seems but five minutes since the hour struck. To-morrow will be the thirteenth; surely he might have reached us two days ago! And as long as he comes not, the moments and the hours and the days seem to fly past with unnatural and relentless speed, until at last we begin to despair that he will ever come back at all.

The condition of Mirabel, and the chances that Lancaster would return in time to save his life, were now the general topic of conversation. Even those who had hitherto looked most coldly upon the young couple, and said the unkindest things about them, found it impossible to resist the contagion of interest and sympathy. Cards were left almost daily at the house, accompanied by inquiries

and expressions of condolence. Madame Mirabel saw no one; but the servant was deputed to give her mistress's kind love, and to say that there was no improvement. Had any reply been received from Dr. Lancaster?—was now the question of the hour, and as far as could be ascertained nothing had been heard. But surely, as Mrs. Fullerton observed in discussing the matter with the rector's wife, the doctor himself must arrive in the course of a day or two, for Mr. Palliser, who knew all about it, had assured her that the telegram had been sent on Monday. The calculation, however, was wrong, for the simple reason that the telegram had not been sent till Tuesday afternoon; a fact which was unknown to Mrs. Palliser, who had formed too hasty a conclusion from what Madame Mirabel had written.

The appearance of Gorse Cottage, all the blinds of which were carefully pulled down, had in itself a sort of mysterious fascination for passers-by. What was really the matter with the secluded man? What was going on behind those shrouded windows? A vague though unmistakable feeling of wonder and curiosity, not unmixed with awe, gradually spread abroad. People found themselves almost inclined to shudder, sometimes, as they passed; the whole thing was so strange, so inexplicable, and so very, very sad. The only person who was at all in a position to elucidate the mystery was Dr. Charlton, and he reaped the benefit accordingly. Never had the ladies of the neighborhood been so unanimous in feeling ever so slightly unwell. Colds, headaches, little attacks of indigestion and menaces of influenza seemed to spring up on all hands, and Dr. Charlton was overwhelmed with little notes requesting him to call. But all he was in a position to say rather whetted the public curiosity than satisfied it. The young Frenchman, he averred, was dying of weakness, of want of vitality; there seemed to be some hidden mischief at work which neither he nor any other doctor could detect, which was draining and sapping the man's life. Lancaster? By all means let Lancaster be recalled; but it would be entirely useless, as far as any chance of saving the patient was concerned. To all intents and purposes Mirabel was already dead. He had no longer any power of assimilation; his heart was laboring, incapable of performing its proper functions; the blood was in a fair way to stagnate in his veins; the brain was torpid, the entire nervous system a complete wreck. Lancaster, said Dr. Charlton, could no more bring the man back to life than he could rebuild a house that had fallen down. At the

same time, added the doctor, the return of Lancaster was desirable, as he might be able to throw some light upon the origin of Mirabel's collapse, which, as far as he could see, was at present an impenetrable mystery.

On the Thursday morning, the rector and his wife called at Gorse Cottage to make inquiries. Madame Mirabel happened to see them from the first-floor landing, and immediately came down. This was the one exception that she made, and she had her reasons for it.

"Ah, I am so glad to have caught you," she said, as she ushered them into the drawing-room. "I've not been able to see anybody else. It is so good of you to come to me—so very, very good."

She looked white and worn. Mrs. Grant replied—

"We could not do otherwise, Madame Mirabel. The whole neighborhood, so to speak, is watching with you at your poor husband's bedside. Is there no word, as yet, from Dr. Lancaster?"

"None," said Madame Mirabel.

"And is there—er—no change?" asked the rector.

"Only for the worse, I am afraid," she answered, in stifled tones. "I fear terribly that unless Dr. Lancaster returns within the next two days, it will be too late."

The Grants did not linger. In fact it was clear to them that they could do no good, and Madame Mirabel was evidently anxious to rejoin her dying husband. But it was known all over Hindhead before night that the patient had grown worse, and appeared to be sinking rapidly. That evening prayers were put up for him at the week-day service in church.

Friday came—and went. The blinds were still kept down; no sign was visible of any arrival. The door was opened to inquirers by a tear-stained servant, who only said that the master was worse and they feared there was no hope. Pressed a little further by one lady, she confessed that they only knew what Madame Mirabel had told them; no one was now permitted to enter the sick-chamber but herself.

"I wonder *what* she telegraphed, Marmaduke," said Mrs. Paliser, that evening. "So much might depend on that. I do hope and trust she made it quite clear to him that he must come back at once!"

"I think she did," remarked Gerard. "She assured me that she had worded the message so that there could be no mistake. She's not the woman to do a thing by halves."

This was perfectly true.

That night a very strange thing occurred. About two in the morning, when the house was as still as death, old Mrs. Palliser suddenly woke up, and began to talk in a way that made even Nurse Osborne shudder. She wanted to know who the man was that had just come into the room, and was trying to hide behind the folding-screen; she could just see him—a young man with hollow eyes full of terror, and a frightened look about him somehow—what was he doing there? She thought he must be hiding from somebody who wanted to kill him—he kept peering out every now and then—and he was trying to say something, but—couldn't, because there was somebody she couldn't see who was preventing him. Who was the man? And why did he look like that at her? Ah, he's pointing at something—

"Come, come, there's nothing there; it's all your fancy," said the nurse, as she shook up the old lady's pillow. "Turn over on this side, now, and go to sleep again."

"They want to take him to the church-yard," whispered the old lady, with her gleaming eyes fixed on the nurse's face, "and he is asking for help. There's somebody who will help him when he comes back. Don't let them have him, my dear—lock the door, or they'll come in—there's a woman outside, and she's got a hearse ready, you know—and—"

"Go to sleep, I tell you," said the nurse sharply. The old lady continued to mutter incoherently for a few moments, and then closed her eyes. The nurse, agitated in spite of herself, altered the position of the screen, trimmed the night-light, and lay down again. But it was some time before she fell asleep, and the next morning she mentioned the occurrence to Gerard.

Saturday! And yet no news of Lancaster. Gerard, on whose mind the nurse's story had left a haunting impression of some unknown and unimaginable horror, sought relief in a long walk through the open country. It was dull, gray day with a warm, moisture-laden wind, and he cannot be said to have much enjoyed the exercise. Anything was better than inaction, but nothing could possibly alleviate the sense of anxiety and perplexity and foreboding which oppressed him. Had he himself been responsible for poor Mirabel's hopeless state, he could scarcely have felt more uneasy than he did.

He got back about five o'clock, and flung himself down in an arm-chair near the fireplace. His mother was in the room, with

an open book before her, from which, however, her attention constantly strayed; at the table sat Mr. Palliser, frowning over the *Times*. For nearly two hours did Gerard remain there, answering his parents' remarks in the briefest possible way. Then the dinner-bell rang.

"I'm not coming to dinner to-night," he said, rising abruptly.

"My dear Gerard! why not?" asked his mother.

"I'm going to Mirabel's," he answered. "I can't help it—I must go. I must know the truth about him. I've a sort of presentiment that I can't resist—I believe that his fate will be decided one way or another this night."

"But you must have some dinner"—began Mrs. Palliser.

"I can eat something when I come back," said Gerard. "Don't worry about me, mother; I feel I must go now. I expect I shall be able to bring you some news before you go to bed."

He put on his hat, and left the house without another word. The wind had shifted a little since the afternoon, and blew somewhat chillier; black, heavy clouds came rolling up from the south-east, veiling the early moon, while the dark fir-trees waved their branches to and fro as the fitful gusts blew through them. Gerard walked swiftly on in the direction of Gorse Cottage, his whole mind concentrated upon the thought of what lay before him. He was determined that, come what might, *he would see Mirabel*; his conscience smote him for having delayed so long; it was no time now for standing upon ceremony. And if the man were dying, he would stay with him till the end.

Turning a corner, he caught sight of a woman's figure hurrying on in front of him. He quickened his pace, and came up with her.

"Susan!" he exclaimed, recognizing the girl. "Where have you been? How is your master to-night?"

She started violently; then, recovering herself, cried:

"Oh, Mr. Palliser, I'm glad it's you! There's something dreadful happened I believe—the master was took with a sort of convulsion an hour ago, and I've been for Dr. Charlton. I doubt the poor master's dying—and the doctor's gone to Petersfield, and they don't think he'll be back for an hour. The master's dying, sir, if he isn't dead already—"

"Dead already?" echoed Gerard. "There, don't cry—the doctor will be here soon, no doubt. What makes you think your master's —"

"I haven't seen him, sir, for days," cried the girl, "and no one's allowed to go inside the room. And cook, sir, she swore to me last night she see him all alone, standing in the drawing-room where 'e used to sit before he was took so bad—standing there in the gloaming for all the world like a corpse as 'ad risen from the dead. She give a shriek, sir, and came flying down into the kitchen to me like a mad woman, sayin' she believed the master was dead and that his ghost was walking. There seems a curse on the house, sir—we can't sleep o' nights for thinkin' about it, and I'm sure I've prayed night and day to the Almighty for to send Dr. Lancaster back; the missis she says never a word, and the way that poor thing do keep up is just wonderful—but there's something in it all as we none of us understand, and I'm real thankful as you are coming in just now."

"You shouldn't listen to all that nonsense of the cook's," said Gerard, with a sensation as if cold water were running down his back. "I intend if possible to see Dr. Mirabel to-night, and I shall stay with him as long as necessary."

The girl made no reply, and in a few minutes they reached the house. Madame Mirabel opened the door.

"I overtook Susan on my way here," said Gerard, without noticing her look of surprise. "Charlton has gone to Petersfield, but will come on as soon as he returns. And now I want to see Mirabel."

She looked at him silently for a moment or two. "Very well," she said at last. "You can come and sit in his room if you wish."

"Is he —" Gerard stopped.

"He is dying, I believe," she answered, briefly.

Gerard followed her up-stairs, his heart beating audibly against his ribs. She opened the door, and ushered him in. A single lamp was burning on a side table, and its rays fell flickeringly upon the face of the dying man. But was that Mirabel's face—those leaden, sunken cheeks, those glassy, spectral eyes, those drawn, thin, purple lips? Was it Mirabel's form that lay stretched there, rigid, angular, and still? A ghost—a corpse—a skeleton; not, surely, a living man!

Sick and horrified, Gerard took a seat on the farther side of the bed, and gazed at the wreck of his poor friend. For some time he never stirred, and scarcely dared to breathe. Then he put out his hand, and laid it on Mirabel's. The eyes turned slowly upon

him, with a dumb, dazed look ; then there appeared in them, very gradually, the far-off glimmer of a smile—the faintest, feeblest, ghost of a smile, as near an approach to one as might be made by a man under torture upon the rack. But only for a second. It faded away again at once.

He sat there for an hour, still holding Mirabel's hand. Not a word was uttered. In a distant corner, away from the light, sat Madame Mirabel ; pale, motionless, and silent. What thoughts, we may well wonder, filled her brain during those terrible moments ? Did she look beyond the four walls of that fatal room—beyond the scene around her — out into the distant future ? Or was she thinking of the past ? There may have been something in her past to cause regret, or anguish, or remorse ; there might be that in store for her the anticipation of which might cause her heart to throb with joy, hope, ecstasy ; ah, who could tell ? Then was that hour indeed a most tremendous crisis. The hard old days of penury and servitude, the years of unequal union with one she had never loved, were now all gone ; that night would draw the curtain on them all, and relegate them to the realm of memories : and then would come the hoped-for, longed-for, schemed-for Future ! And as she sat in her dark corner, and hid her turbulent sensations under the white mask of her impassive face, as she listened to the ticking of the clock upon the mantel-piece and the stertorous breathing of the doomed man upon the bed, it seemed to her as though she actually heard the passing of Time's footsteps, and the approach of that new life of joy and victory so soon to be in her grasp.

Another half-hour dragged its slow length along. Then a slight change took place in Mirabel. He grew restless. He rolled his head uneasily from side to side, and Gerard distinctly felt a slight pressure from the thin, dry fingers. There was also an increase in the action of the heart, a movement in the feet, and a wrinkling in the skin of the forehead, which told of some disturbance. Madame Mirabel glanced at him, shook her head, and then resumed her seat. The symptoms quieted down after a few moments, and he fell once more into his normal state of almost cataleptic rigidity ; but the alteration arrested Gerard's attention, for he had noticed the appearance of a more human expression in Mirabel's eyes — short and fleeting, indeed, but still unmistakable while it lasted. There was a look of watchfulness, eagerness, almost of hope. What could that portend ?

This occurred three times; then, as though exhausted by the excitement—if excitement it was—Mirabel sank into even profounder lethargy than before.

Suddenly a slight noise from down-stairs was heard. The bell pealed, and there was a sound of persons moving. Madame Mirabel started, and bent her head as though listening. "Dr. Charlton at last!" she said in an undertone, glancing towards Gerard. Mirabel continued motionless; but he breathed more heavily, and there was a tremor in his hands which seemed to indicate a sort of hidden agitation. Gerard even fancied he saw the slightest possible flush upon his wan cheeks; but this almost immediately subsided, leaving them as darkly pallid as before. The eyes remained fast closed.

Then footsteps were heard ascending the staircase. They came nearer and nearer; they were quick and hurried, like those of one who fears he may be too late. Was Charlton really back at last? Would he be able to do anything for the patient now that he had come? A little flame of fire, darting up from the neglected embers, illuminated the room with its red glare, bringing into still ghastlier relief the corpse-like features of the sufferer. It seemed to Gerard like a harbinger of the impending crisis. Then the door opened with an impetuous movement, and in rushed—Dr. Lancaster.

He stood transfixed, as his eyes fell upon the awful figure on the bed. Astonishment, perplexity, and horror deprived him, for a moment, of the power of speech. "My God!" he ejaculated at last.

The two servants, weeping bitterly, followed him into the room, regardless of their mistress's orders. One, who was a Catholic, fell upon her knees and crossed herself. Madame Mirabel advanced, and stood at the foot of the bed.

"My poor fellow!" exclaimed Lancaster, bending over him in a very passion of pity and remorse. "What can have happened to you? Good God, why did I not know of this in time!"

Slowly and painfully Mirabel opened his eyes, showing the same glassy, dreadful stare which had become habitual to him. For a moment or two he saw no one; and the profoundest silence reigned. Then he turned his gaze on Lancaster. A puzzled expression now succeeded the hard, unseeing look; then came astonishment, wonder, hope, and finally there leaped into his eyes a bright, swift flash of joy—such joy as had never shone from them

before — the joy of a great deliverance, of quickening and returning life.

“Lancaster!” he almost shrieked, throwing out both his hands. “He has come to me at last. Lancaster, my friend, save me! Ah, my God, I have died a thousand times. I thought you would never come, and I should go into the blackness and the darkness forever. But now you are here, and I shall live—live—live! Ah, it is good to see you. I am happy now—it is at last well with me—you will save me, Lancaster, and I shall die no more.”

A bright, sweet smile of unutterable happiness overspread his face. The moment afterwards his strength failed, and he gasped a little for breath; then, with a look of entire content and peace, he sank gently back upon his pillow, and passed into the great Beyond.

CHAPTER XVI

"IT WOULD BE COWARDLY TO RUN AWAY"

WE meet our friends the Pallisers again on a snowy morning in January. The undulating stretch of beautiful table-land is covered a full foot deep with a carpet of unsullied white, over which a gray sky arches duskily; but the air is pure and soft and still, and the trees bend under their heavy wreaths of silvery fur, and the blue smoke of the wood-fires rises high into the clear atmosphere with scarcely an appreciable curve.

Within, a cheerful glow falls upon the spotless napery of Mrs. Palliser's pretty breakfast-table, at one end of which her husband, who has pushed his cup aside, now sits immersed in last night's *Globe*—for the London morning papers are not procurable on Hindhead as early as, perhaps, they might be—while Gerard is playing listlessly with his spoon, glancing ever and anon in the direction of the door. There is a brisker, brighter look about Mr. Palliser than when last we met him; the careworn, troubled scowl has apparently disappeared, and his expression, as he reads the "turn-over," is unmistakably benign.

"Yes, it's a brightly written little sheet," he remarked complacently, as he passed it on to Gerard. "Those paragraphs on the second page are always sparkling and chatty. But I wish the *Times* would come."

"The gardener ought to be here soon," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "I told him to call at the station for it on his way, as I knew you'd be anxious to see it. What makes you think the news will be in this morning?"

"A man told me some days ago it would be out in a week," answered Mr. Palliser, looking at his watch, "and I've been on the lookout for it ever since. A quarter-past nine. He ought to be here now."

"The snow's pretty deep," suggested Gerard.

"Ah, so it is," returned his father. "I dare say it's heavy walking up that hill. Just the sort of day for one of your long peregrinations across country, Gerard."

"Gymnastics are not much in my line," said Gerard, dryly.

"Well, it's been a dreadfully anxious time," remarked Mrs. Palliser, reverting to the former subject. "It was bad enough for us, but it must have been far worse for the banks and people in the City. Over-speculation, I suppose, as usual. 'They that make haste to be rich'—the old story, you know. I do hope it's all over now, Marmaduke?"

"I think we've weathered the storm," replied Mr. Palliser. "I think so. But it has been an uncommon close shave—uncommon close. If the Metropolitan Joint Stock Bank had gone, half the City would have been ruined. My word! I shall never forget what it was like the last time I went up to town. However, I think it's all right now. We've pulled through this time, anyhow."

"There's the gardener!" exclaimed the good lady. "I hear him stamping the snow off his shoes outside."

Mr. Palliser rose, pulled down his waistcoat, and awaited events. It was the gardener, and the next minute he had pounced upon the *Times*, and was poring through his gold eye-glasses over the City article.

"It's floated!" he suddenly cried, in a triumphant tone.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed his wife.

"Floated at last," repeated the worthy gentleman, impressively. "Gerard, this concerns you. Do you hear? That company is floated at last!"

"What company?" asked Gerard, absently looking up from his paper.

"What company, indeed?" echoed his mother. "My dear boy, you don't deserve to have anything done for you at all; upon my word you don't. Why, that company your father took shares in last May; have you forgotten already? The Anti-Intoxicating Liquor Association, of course, in which you were to be one of the agents. It's been hanging fire all this time, owing partly to difficulties about registration or something—I don't understand it—and partly to all this dreadful panic-affair that has happened in the City since. And now at last it's floated, and you don't seem to take any more interest in it than—than— Oh, you drive me out of all patience, Gerard," concluded the excellent lady, unable to find a simile of sufficient strength.

"I remember it well enough," said Gerard. "I'm glad it's floated. You'll be able to get out of those shares now."

"What—sell the shares? You must be mad, my dear," ex-

claimed Mrs. Palliser, peremptorily. "It would be just throwing away a fortune. You see now, Gerard, how mistaken you were about the matter. I was always sure that your father must have been right."

Gerard smiled. "I suppose the Directorate is a strong one," he said, interrogatively. "Of course, if it's in the hands of respectable capitalists who know what they're about, that's another thing altogether."

"H'm—let's look," said Mr. Palliser. "Ah! here it is. 'Directors—the Earl of Rottentowers, K.P., Sir Hocus Juggle, Bart., Lord Swindledupe, Lord Featherbrain, the Hon. Augustus Flatt, Colonel Innocent (Royal Bengal Superbs), Dodson Fogg, Esq., Janus Blandyshe, Esq., and Letts Cheetham, Esq.—with power to add to their number.' Upon my word, it reads uncommonly well. The Earl of Rottentowers belongs to the very oldest and bluest blood in the United Kingdom. His name is a guarantee in itself. You've heard of Blandyshe, of course. The great philanthropist, you know. Flatt's a son of Viscount—er—Viscount—er—bless my life, I shall forget my own name next; Fogg and Cheetham are both lawyers, I believe. What I like about the Directorate is its representative character; its absence of cliquism. Doesn't it strike you in the same light, Gerard?"

"I think the list would look better if it included the names of a few solid merchants—men who are known to have money at their backs, and who occupy a position of some sort in the City," remarked Gerard, mildly.

"Why, it's a splendid Directorate!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "I can't think what you want, my dear, I'm sure. However, we shall see. It would be a thousand pities to do anything rash, and it would be more than rash—simple lunacy, indeed—to go and sell the shares just when the enterprise is being started. But it's just like you, Gerard, to throw cold water upon everything. You always will look upon the dark side of things, and it's a fault you ought to try and cure yourself of, my dear. You'll find it a clog upon you through life."

The sound of a lady descending the stairs was now heard from the outside. Gerard looked up expectantly.

"There's Madame Mirabel at last," said Mrs. Palliser. "How late she is this morning, to be sure!"

Yes, it was true—Madame Mirabel was actually a guest in the cheerful household of Mr. and Mrs. Palliser, and had, indeed, been

so for some weeks. As soon as her husband's funeral was over she had, with the fullest approval of all who sympathized with her in her bereavement, gone away for a much-needed rest and change. It would clearly have been impossible for her to remain alone at Gorse Cottage with the remembrance of her husband's distressing death fresh within her, and she no doubt acted wisely in leaving the country altogether for a time. But though she travelled alone, she did not show herself in any way anxious to avoid such opportunities of friendly intercourse as chance threw in her way. She went first to Paris, where she rested for a few days; then she proceeded to the Riviera, where the hotels were very full. Madame Mirabel put up at one of the most frequented, and immediately attracted attention. Her deep mourning, combined with her unquestionable beauty and grave, sweet manners, made the young English widow an object of much interest and regard. It was known that her loss was recent, yet she never obtruded her sorrows upon other people, as some women might have done, nor did she incase herself in a panoply of reserve; on the contrary, she was quiet and unassuming, cheerful in a subdued way, always ready to take an intelligent part in conversation, and amiable to everybody she met. And she did more than not avoid society; she actually courted it. It was soon observed that Madame Mirabel was never alone. If she went out for a walk, she was sure to have some companion—a woman, be it observed, as often as a man, so that no shadow of reproach was ever cast upon her; while indoors she was always found in the most cheerful group, surrounded by the best talkers, and interested in every subject that might be discussed. One lady, who had seen perhaps more of her than most other guests, referred smilingly to this one day, and congratulated Madame Mirabel upon being the most *répandue* of them all. "Yes," she replied. "Sorrow affects people differently. Some women in my position would find society intolerable. My feelings are just the opposite. Ever since my husband died I have had a morbid horror of loneliness."

Madame Mirabel stayed abroad about two months, at the expiration of which time she found it necessary, for business purposes, to return to England. In her letters to Mrs. Palliser, with whom she corresponded, she of course mentioned the fact, remarking upon the painful associations which would be revived on her resuming occupancy of Gorse Cottage. Gerard immediately proposed to his mother that Madame Mirabel should be invited to stay

with them for a few weeks, until her plans for the future were matured ; and Mrs. Palliser, though somewhat taken aback at the suggestion, eventually agreed to it. Mr. Palliser, of course, had no objection, and the invitation, on being sent, was gratefully accepted. What wonder that Madame Mirabel felt reluctant to go and live all by herself in a house haunted by such dreadful memories ? And thus it happened that she was now installed, a welcome guest, under the Pallisers' hospitable roof, with Gerard as her *cavaliere servente*.

"I'm disgracefully late," she said, after greetings had been exchanged. "The fact is I didn't have a very good night, and so I overslept myself."

"You look as though you hadn't slept well," remarked Mrs. Palliser, sympathetically, as she noticed Madame Mirabel's pale cheeks and the dark rings round her eyes. "A cup of good strong coffee will be the best thing for you ; nothing like coffee when you've had a bad night. It's a pity the snow's so deep, otherwise you might have a walk. The air was delicious when I opened my bedroom window an hour ago."

"Yes," assented Madame Mirabel, as she drank some coffee, and made a not very successful effort to dispose of the toast and bacon with which Gerard had provided her. "I think I should like to get out a little if possible—I'm not afraid of the snow, and I dare say there are some places where it isn't quite so deep as it seems to be just here."

"I'll come with you, if you don't mind," said Gerard.

"I shall be very glad indeed," she replied, quietly. "I want to go over to the Cottage."

She had only been there once since her return, and Mrs. Palliser had noticed that she seemed ever so little upset when she came back—than which nothing could be more natural. The place was in temporary charge of a care-taker, the two servants having been dismissed to their respective homes in Petersfield and Liphook.

"Dear Madame Mirabel," said Mrs. Palliser, after a pause, "do you really intend to go and live in Gorse Cottage permanently again ? Don't you think it would be nice, now, if you gave it up, and looked out for some pretty place in the neighborhood of Shottermill, for instance, or Liphook ? I remember a few weeks ago there was a charming little house to be let near Bramshott, and it may be empty still. It has always seemed to me that Gorse Cottage is so exposed."

"That is true," replied Madame Mirabel, "but I doubt whether I could let it easily, and you know we took it for three years. Besides, don't you think it would be rather cowardly to run away?"

"Cowardly! Why?" asked Mr. Palliser, somewhat abruptly.

"Of course I understand what you mean," continued Madame Mirabel, "and no doubt there are some persons to whom it would be impossible to live in the house again. But I think that such feelings ought to be overridden. They are simply a sign of weakness, and should not be given into. Besides, the place suits me."

In what way it suited her, Madame Mirabel did not explain; but it certainly seemed to have a very strange fascination for her, judging by the systematic way in which she explored it an hour afterwards in company with Gerard, and the length of time she lingered in every room. The house looked, as houses do under such circumstances, gloomy and empty and desolate. And there was something in the atmosphere of it, apart from the physical cold, that made her companion shiver. She herself appeared to feel it too, but she never gave way to it for a moment. In fact, the more painful were the associations of any particular room, the longer and more deliberate was her stay in it. Gerard wondered, but said nothing. Nor did Madame Mirabel say much. Her face was calm, but there was a set expression in it, a look of purpose and determination, and she seemed to be deep in thought. It occurred to Gerard that she was there to test her own strength of mind, to see what effect the sight of the rooms would have upon her, and whether it would be possible for her to inhabit them again, alone; perhaps to accustom herself to them beforehand; again, what more natural, now that she had made up her mind to return? Once or twice there was a look of inquiry, or expectancy, in her eyes, as if she were searching for something, or thought she might see something, in one or other of the rooms; but she gave no sign, and Gerard was conscious of a great relief when she said she was ready to go.

The snow was hard and crisp, with a deepish drift every now and then, and the sun had just begun to send a few faint glimmers through the gray canopy overhead. They walked on for some time in silence. At last Madame Mirabel observed:

"I have always thought it a great mistake to avoid all mention of the dead, as scrupulously as so many people do. One is constantly thinking of them; why should they never be talked about? I confess I have no sympathy with such feelings."

"Perhaps it is a mistake," said Gerard.

"For instance, why does no one ever speak of Gaston in my presence?" she continued. "Do they think it would hurt me? I think it is far worse to feel that there's a subject which is really uppermost in all our minds, and which yet must never be referred to. I suppose you, now, think of him sometimes?"

"Indeed I do," said Gerard, "and of his dreadful death. I shall never forget that."

"Yes, it was all very terrible," said Madame Mirabel. "And yet, you know, when we remember what his belief was—how sure he was of a brighter existence in the future—"

"Ah!" interrupted Gerard, with a slight show of animation. "Do you remember what he said once, when we were discussing his Theory—that I doubted it, but you denied it? I think it might have made him happier for your sake if you could have admitted the possibility of its truth. I wonder how many of his projects have been realized since!"

"Then you no longer 'doubt'?" said Madame Mirabel.

"Yes, I do," replied Gerard. "I neither believe it nor disbelieve it. There is only one thing that would convince me of its truth."

"And that is—?"

"The sight, in broad daylight, of a person I knew to have died," he said.

"Hallucinations are common enough," answered Madame Mirabel, with a touch of scorn. "I would not believe in the objectivity of any apparition, even if I saw one."

"Then you really believe that Mirabel no longer exists—that he is absolutely and entirely annihilated?" asked Gerard.

"I believe," she said slowly, "that at this moment he is as absolutely non-existent as though he had never been born."

Gerard had never quite realized what annihilation meant until Madame Mirabel put it like that. It caused a reaction at once.

"I can't believe that," he said. "There are some personalities so intensely real to us that their extinction seems an impossibility—all one's natural intuitions rebel at the idea. I know," he added with a slight laugh, "that I am contradicting what I said just now. Perhaps it will be clearer to me some day."

Madame Mirabel made no reply, and they walked on for a short time in silence. At last Gerard observed, somewhat hesitatingly—

"Do you know, I can't help thinking my mother was right

about that house. I wish you hadn't decided to go and live in it again. I'm sure you'll not be comfortable."

"What makes you think so?" she asked.

"I felt anything but comfortable in it myself, just now," said Gerard, simply.

Madame Mirabel glanced quickly at him for a moment.

"You should study physiology," she replied, with the slightest possible smile. "The nervous system is the most treacherous agency we have to deal with in life. It is constantly leading us astray, and always will unless we get to understand it thoroughly, so as to be ever on our guard. You say you felt uncomfortable just now in Gorse Cottage. Well, so did I. There's no reason why I shouldn't be as frank as you are. But what of that? The house was cold and silent and deserted; and the sight of the rooms evoked associations which cannot but be painful as long as they linger with us. Now my common sense tells me that to give the house up altogether, upon such grounds as you suggest, would be a supremely stupid thing to do, apart from the fact that I have it on my hands for about two years more, and cannot afford to pay a double rent. I should feel contemptible in my own eyes were I to give way to sensations so purely subjective and illusory. I shall be lonely, I dare say; but then I have to live alone—it is not a question of choice—and, after all, I shall not be wholly without companionship. I have my books, you know, I have a few good friends, and—I have you, Gerard. I suppose we shall meet occasionally."

Gerard flushed with pleasure. She did not include him among the few good friends—she gave him a place by himself. From that moment he walked on air.

"I think you will have some difficulty with my mother when you begin to talk of leaving us," he said. "She has taken to you wonderfully of late."

"Your mother has been kindness itself," answered Madame Mirabel. "But of course the day must come, and there will soon be no excuse for taking further advantage of her hospitality. How fresh the air is! A walk on a day like this seems to renew one's youth. I have always intended to try and get as far as Selborne some fine day, but I'm almost afraid it's beyond my reach. There's no exercise I enjoy so much as walking."

"Do you never ride?" asked Gerard.

"I've never been able to afford it," she said, frankly. "I've no

doubt it is very exhilarating; but then one must always have a feeling of dependence, and that I do not like. I prefer being free on my own feet. I have a passion for freedom—freedom from all conventional restraints of whatsoever nature, from intellectual tyranny, from predispositions, above all from subjective illusions—”

“Especially those which arise from that treacherous nervous system,” put in Gerard, laughing.

“They all arise from that,” said Madame Mirabel. “Ah, how few of us are really emancipated! And emancipated we never shall be as long as we remain ignorant. Knowledge is freedom, for without knowledge we are the slaves of error in its most fatal forms. All our social systems, all our accepted codes, are based upon one grand mistake—the mistake of imagining that they are the outgrowth of some absolute, definite principle. On the contrary, they are composed of inherited instincts, bound together by conventionalities. Take ethics, for example. Is there any true basis under our popular notions of morality? The extinction by one man of another man’s life is called murder, and punished accordingly. It is as much ‘murder’ to kill a tyrant who is a curse to millions, or to extinguish the life of a monstrosity as soon as it is born, or painlessly to put a hopeless sufferer out of his misery, as to poison a harmless fellow-creature in cold blood from sheer spite or hatred. Isn’t that absurd? There are nations among whom it is the highest exhibition of filial piety to put an end to one’s parents when they have grown old. Why should the same act be moral there and immoral here? Oh, the inconsistency of our European moralists is simply charming. They will talk of such and such historical personages who lived two thousand years ago in terms of admiration, almost of reverence, in spite of the fact that the private lives of these personages were such as would consign the offender to-day to eternal ostracism—to the universal detestation of his fellows, so that his very name would not be mentioned in polite society. And why? Well, the historical personages were great men; they were poets and statesmen and philosophers; their works are read in all our schools and universities, and they are revered accordingly. It is nonsense to talk of the principles of our morality after that. We have no principles. In fact, there are none to have. Everything begins and ends with expediency, and I believe that people are beginning to see the truth at last.”

“I think *your* emancipation must be pretty complete,” observed Gerard, mildly wondering.

"I certainly have very few prejudices," she replied.

Gerard fell into a fit of musing. Very few prejudices! Of how many women of his acquaintance could that be said? His dear good mother, for example: why, she was full of prejudices—excellent prejudices in their way, no doubt, and always on the side of good, however mistakenly—but prejudices notwithstanding; and Gerard was impatient of prejudice in every shape, and rather plumed himself upon his open mind. Rosie, too. What an ignorant, empty-headed, contemptible little piece of pink-and-white she was! And that was actually the creature—as prejudiced as she was ignorant—whom the dear foolish old mother had evidently selected as his life-companion. Fancy, he thought, being tied for fifty or sixty years to a hollow thing like Rosie! No, the world contained but one woman who could command and share his sympathies, who could see with him eye to eye, who could be to him the confidante and support he needed. His gaze rested on her as she walked free and erect beside him, the pure, fresh air calling up a faint shell-pink in her pale face, her lips slightly apart, her blue, clear eyes shining with intelligence and thought. Would she ever belong to him?

Their arrival at home interrupted this dangerous day-dream for the nonce, and the luncheon-bell soon gave him something else to think of. Madame Mirabel was as calm and self-collected as usual, and ate with an excellent appetite.

CHAPTER XVII

A MOST UNCANNY ROOM

THE sympathy of the neighborhood with Madame Mirabel during the last few days of her husband's life had expanded into something almost like a feeling of cordiality towards her since her return from the Continent. Of course, the recency of her loss forbade anything in the nature of invitations; nor did Mrs. Palliser ask anybody to the house. But calls were not infrequent, and Madame Mirabel, to her somewhat cynical amusement, found herself quite a popular character. She no longer made her mental superiority felt in the irritating way that had previously so much annoyed the good ladies who were inclined to patronize her. She listened with smiling indulgence to their teacup chatter about parish work, district-visiting, art-embroidery, and nice books; she joined in their conversations, illuminating the trivialities in which they delighted with clever and original suggestions; she even went so far as to express a wish to know more about such things, and to deplore, in a tone of gentle regret, that her life had up till then been so sadly useless. Gerard was perhaps the only person who felt that in spite of everything she was not really changed; and he was fain to admire the good feeling and unerring tact with which she adapted herself to her surroundings.

And then she patronized Rosie. Nothing more was required to confirm good Mrs. Palliser's new-found affection for her guest. As soon as she saw that, all reserve, all concealment, was forever at an end. Was not Rosie a dear, sweet child? And would she not make a perfect, an ideal, wife for dear Gerard? Madame Mirabel's lips took a significantly downward curve when she heard that; but she replied that no doubt such an arrangement would be most desirable, supposing that Gerard could be brought to view dear Rosie in the proper light. And then Mrs. Palliser would sigh, and look rather wistful—there was such a vein of perversity in dear Gerard somehow, and it was so curious that he did not take more after his parents, in which case of course there would have been no

difficulty ; so Madame Mirabel would suggest that they were both full young to settle yet, and that it would be well if Gerard saw something of the world first. This remark would bring up Sweden, and the revived hopes centred upon the great new company, to the pleasurable excitement of Mrs. Palliser ; and in this way Madame Mirabel soon found herself on very confidential terms with her good hostess.

But the time soon came when she had to go to her own house. A week after the incident described in our last chapter she engaged a couple of new servants, had fresh curtains put up in some of the rooms, altered the arrangement of the furniture in others ; opened all the windows, and ordered fires to be lighted both up stairs and down. It was impossible, she told the Pallisers, that she could go on encroaching upon their hospitality forever, and the sooner she began her new life the better. Mr. Palliser, of course, begged her not to be in too great a hurry, and his wife demurred still more urgently, vowing that she should scarcely know what to do with herself when bereft of so sympathetic and delightful a companion ; but no real resistance was made to the inevitable flitting. After all, she was not going very far away ; nor was there much reason, apart of course from her widowhood, to commiserate her unduly. She had been left very comfortably off. Three hundred a year in French Rentes, and five thousand pounds from the company in which her husband had insured his life seven years before, formed a competency with which no young woman in her position need be dissatisfied ; while as for society, occupation, friends, to say nothing of that liberty which of all women only a widow can enjoy, she now had the ball, so to speak, at her feet. Indeed many people wondered why, in such circumstances, she elected to remain at Hindhead at all. Up till her husband's death, she had had no friends, excepting Gerard Palliser and Dr. Lancaster. Even now she had received kindness merely from her neighbors ; there was no real sympathy between her and them, no intellectual touch, no enjoyment in each others' society for its own sake. And yet she insisted on staying. True, she had Gorse Cottage upon her hands, and there might have been some difficulty in letting it ; but she never even attempted to do so. It certainly looked as though she had some special reason for adhering to both the neighborhood and the house.

At last it was settled that she should remove on the following Thursday afternoon, and Mr. and Mrs. Palliser and Gerard accom-

panied her. The snow was still lying about in considerable quantities, but it was hard and dry underfoot, and the walk proved a very pleasant one. Mr. Palliser had never been inside the house before; his wife, as will be remembered, only once. Madame Mirabel thereupon insisted upon their coming in for a cup of tea, and, while this was being prepared, she took them through all the rooms. A sort of awed silence fell upon the group as they went up-stairs. The recollection of that terrible evening three months ago came back on Gerard's mind with painful intensity, and the sight of the room in which poor Mirabel had died with the words of hope and life upon his lips affected Mrs. Palliser very distressingly. She kept up a sort of little cooing murmur expressive of the susceptibility within, shaking her head dolorously from side to side, with a woe-begone look which contrasted strangely with the set calmness of Madame Mirabel herself; while Mr. Palliser h'mmed two or three times frowningly, assuming a judicial air, as though he thought there might be something in the very atmosphere of the place to account for the tragedy that had been enacted in it.

"And yet it's a nice, airy, comfortable room," he said at last, "and you've a fine view from the windows. There's Ludshott Common. It must be delightful here in the summer. I don't know that you're not right after all to stick to the place. You might find it difficult to get another that would suit you equally well."

"That's exactly what I feel," said Madame Mirabel.

A gleam of pale wintry sunshine was lying across the floor, reaching just far enough to gild the lace-edged pillows of the bed. It was a very ordinary room, containing little beyond a pier-glass, a chest of drawers, a wardrobe, a washing-stand, a toilet-table, a sofa, and a few chairs; and yet there was something about it that gave one an uneasy feeling, a sense of discomfort, vague and indescribable, but none the less unpleasant. At that moment the sun disappeared behind a bank of cloud, leaving the chamber cold and dull again.

"Marmaduke," said his wife, suddenly, "let us go down-stairs."

"You don't feel cold, do you?" asked Madame Mirabel, as she prepared to lead the way.

"Not cold exactly, my dear," replied Mrs. Palliser, shivering, "but I like the drawing-room better."

They were soon seated comfortably round the fire, and Mrs. Palliser had never felt more thankful in her life for a cup of good

tea than she did on that occasion. She looked a little pale, and her hand trembled somewhat nervously for a few moments; she felt her heart beating faster than usual, and wondered whether she had not taken a slight chill. Gradually, however, she began to feel better, and was soon chatting gayly enough over her tea and toast; but she knew instinctively that it would have been an absolute impossibility for her to go up-stairs again under any circumstances whatever. They stayed half an hour longer, and then bade their hostess a cordial and affectionate *au revoir*.

"It's not a bad little box," remarked Mr. Palliser, as they walked homeward in the fast-gathering darkness.

"No," replied his wife, as she took his arm. "But, my dear, I could no more live in it than I could fly."

"Why not?" demanded Mr. Palliser.

"I can't tell you, my dear," said the good lady in her staccato way. "I don't know myself. But I never felt so uncomfortable since I was born as I did in that bedroom just now. I couldn't have stayed there another minute if you had paid me a thousand pounds. A sort of qualm came over me, and if I had been all alone I think I should have screamed out."

"Never heard of such a thing in my life," exclaimed her husband. "The room was all right enough. You're not subject to nervous attacks. You are all right now, aren't you?"

"Oh, I'm perfectly well now," said Mrs. Palliser, who began to feel a little ashamed of herself. "I dare say it was a momentary chill. But if I were Madame Mirabel, I could no more sleep in that room—"

"She's the most sensible woman I've ever known," said Mr. Palliser, as his wife paused expressively. "The last person in the world to have any fancies, depend upon it. I'm glad she has decided not to go away. She'll be a great acquisition to the neighborhood when once she comes out of her shell."

As soon as her visitors had gone, Madame Mirabel went straight into the dining-room, and stood for a few moments upon the hearth-rug, gazing thoughtfully into the fire. "And so she felt it, too," she said under her breath. "That's what comes of an over-sensitive nervous system. Strange that an impalpable nothing like association should have such power—should be able to affect the very muscles of the heart, and set the nerves quivering! But then that woman is all nerves. She has no mind, in the popular sense of the word. Well, here I am, alone at last—face to face with my new life. Suppose I begin it at once?"

She rang for lights, and then, opening her desk, set herself to work. Many were the documents she opened, glanced through, and docketed, entering the particulars of each in a memorandum-book of severely business-like appearance; then she made various calculations, which appeared to yield a satisfactory result, judging from the expression of her face; and finally she wrote several letters—to her lawyers, her bankers, and the Criterion Life Assurance Office among others. This took her altogether a couple of hours. At seven o'clock the servant entered to lay the cloth for dinner, and Madame Mirabel went up-stairs to wash her hands.

In about fifteen minutes she came down again, a slight flush being perceptible upon her cheeks. She did not seem to have much appetite, but ate steadily through the various dishes placed before her as though determined to make a good meal in spite of herself. For some time she allowed the servant to wait upon her in silence. At last she said:

"Sarah, have you and the cook been pretty comfortable since you came here the other day?"

"Yes, quite, ma'am, thank you," replied the girl.

"I hope you always remember to see the doors and windows securely bolted at night, before you go to bed?" pursued Madame Mirabel.

"Oh yes, always, ma'am," said Sarah. "Cook's very particular about that."

"It is just as well to be careful when there is no man in the house," said Madame Mirabel. "I believe there are a good many tramps about just now, and the country people are a rather savage lot, I'm afraid. Did you see the heath-fire the other night?"

"Yes, ma'am, indeed we did," replied Sarah, "over yonder near the Seven Thorns. They do say there was some dispute between the men and Mr. Mortlock's bailiff, Hori Hale, you know, ma'am, and Peter Moorey put 'em up to it. But no one knows for certain who it was, only—"

"Exactly; and probably no one ever will know," interrupted Madame Mirabel. "I only mentioned the fact because it shows how careful you must be. By-the-way, speaking of fires, the fire in my room was nearly out when I went up just now. Just see to it, will you, when you have taken away?"

The girl looked surprised. "Nearly out, did you say, ma'am?" she asked, in a tone of wonder.

"Yes, I did — nearly out," replied Madame Mirabel. "You

must have forgotten to see to it. I always want a good fire in my bedroom, and you must remember that in future."

"But I'd just made it up, ma'am, a quarter of an hour before," asserted Sarah. "It was burning fine when I left it before layin' the cloth for dinner, and looked as though it 'ud last for hours."

"Nonsense! impossible!" exclaimed her mistress.

"It's as true as true, ma'am," said the girl, as she changed Madame Mirabel's plate and placed the decanters on the table. "I think there must be somethin' wrong with the flue; I've noticed before that the fires won't keep in properly in that room. I was a-going to speak to you about it, and ask whether you wouldn't send for a man to see what's the matter with it."

Something in the girl's manner startled Madame Mirabel into attention. She glanced sharply at her for a moment; then relapsing into her usual indifferent style, said carelessly:

"Well, perhaps that is the reason the room always feels so cold. More than one person has noticed it. You may as well tell somebody to call in a day or two, if it doesn't get any better. But there never used to be anything the matter with it. Go up, now, and make it up afresh, and then come down and let me see about it myself."

The girl left the room, and Madame Mirabel, pouring herself out a glass of port, sank into an easy chair and began to read Lotze's *Medical Psychology*. The subject interested her, and she read on and on for some time very attentively; for she had the true student-mind, and that power of concentration which is so rare and so valuable a gift. She was still deep in the book when a tap came at the door, and Sarah entered.

"The fire was quite out, ma'am," said the girl, "but it's burning splendidly now."

"That will do, then; see that it doesn't go out again," replied Madame Mirabel, without raising her eyes from her book.

"If you please, ma'am, would you mind coming to look at it yourself?" asked Sarah.

Madame Mirabel looked at the girl with a sense of annoyed perplexity. For a moment she seemed disinclined to stir; then she hesitated, and finally rose from her chair.

"Very well, Sarah, I'll come," she said, still retaining her hold upon the book. "I see that this fire's getting rather low, so if there is a really good one up-stairs perhaps I may as well sit there altogether."

The hall struck chillily as Madame Mirabel left the warm atmos-

phere of the dining-room, and she shivered slightly as she ascended the dark staircase with the servant following. Then she opened the bedroom door and entered. There was a splendid fire in the grate; Sarah had spared neither coals nor wood, and the logs blazed and crackled merrily, sending out little tongues of flame that filled the room with warm, genial light, so as to render any candles or lamps almost a superfluity. No room could have looked cheerfuller or more inviting, and Madame Mirabel immediately decided upon remaining there for the rest of the evening.

"Come, that looks promising," she said, settling herself comfortably upon the sofa with her back to the fireplace. "You may as well light the lamp, though; and put those billets of wood where I can reach them."

"Shall you want anything more to-night, ma'am?" asked Sarah, when she had done what she was told.

"I think not; but I'll ring if I do," replied Madam Mirabel, resuming her book.

The clock upon the mantel-piece chimed a quarter to nine, and Madame Mirabel, left to herself, was soon deep again in the mysteries of *Medical Psychology*. For about twenty minutes she read on uninterruptedly, a slight smile ever and anon curving her lips at certain passages which betrayed what she considered "the lack of emancipation" under which the philosopher labored; her attention, however, never flagged, nor did her eyes ever wander from the page. Then, very gradually, she became sensible of a slight, vague, curious feeling of restlessness. Her mind began to seem not quite so clear as usual. She found herself obliged to read a sentence several times over before she fully understood its drift; and even then the author's meaning did not stand out so readily and distinctly as it should have done. The sensation of comfort and repose with which she had lain down, too, now gave place to one of uneasiness, which soon increased into disquietude. And yet there was no apparent reason for the change. The house was perfectly still, the room was comfortable—externally at any rate, there was no disturbing cause. At last she had the greatest possible difficulty in maintaining her recumbent attitude; she felt as though she *must* get up. But she was not the woman to succumb to subjective derangements of this sort without knowing the reason why. She quietly put down her book, opened her watch, and felt her pulse. It was full, regular, and healthy. Then she laid her hand upon her heart—with precisely the same result. What,

then, could be the matter? Her nerves were in excellent order; she had never had indigestion in her life; and she certainly had all her wits about her. It was absurd to suppose that she would allow herself to be overcome by fancies. Her brain was too clear and strong for that.

She took up Lotze again, and prepared to resume her studies. To her bewilderment she found the page was almost dark. At the same time she experienced a sensation of strong cold, and shivered. She turned her head with a swift, decided motion behind her. *The fire had gone out.*

For the first time in her life Madame Mirabel was struck dumb. This, at any rate, was no subjective hallucination. She sprang up and stood for a moment or two quite speechless, gazing vacantly at the black grate. Then she knelt down, and examined its contents. The logs were partially burned through; they were dry, and in excellent condition apparently, and there was nothing, as far as she could see, to account for their sudden extinction. At the same moment she became conscious of a gradual darkening of the room behind her. She looked round, and saw that the lamp was going out, too. A slight moisture broke out upon her forehead at this new discovery, but she preserved her coolness intact. It was evident to her that what was occurring was due to some natural cause, or causes, but what they were she was totally unable to discern. She felt perplexed and curious—even a little irritated; but what annoyed her most was the sense that came over her of something akin to a nameless horror—a something external to herself, that seemed to envelop her and press upon her, an invisible influence which seemed determined to terrify and appall her, in spite of her admirably balanced nerves. She felt the influence, but she scorned it, and while she scorned herself for feeling it she resolved that it should not gain the mastery. She rang the bell and waited.

The two or three minutes which elapsed before the appearance of the servant seemed to her like hours. She stood, upright and motionless, with her back to the fireplace, gazing in stolid patience into the gathering darkness before her. At last footsteps were heard ascending the staircase, and the door opened. As the girl came in, and was confronted by the tall, dark, rigid figure of her mistress, standing like a statue in the deep obscurity where twenty minutes before there had been such abundance of warmth and light, she started violently, and uttered a faint scream.

"Don't be foolish, Sarah," said her mistress, sharply. "I see you were right about the fire. It has gone out again. Bring the lamp here, and let us see if we can't find out what is the matter with it."

The girl advanced slowly into the room, and took hold of the lamp, the flame of which had now sunk very low. She tried to turn it up, but the attempt was unsuccessful.

"You must have forgotten to put any oil in," said Madame Mirabel.

"I filled it just before dinner, ma'am, and it's nearly full," replied Sarah, in a somewhat shaky voice. "It seems to me the room's bewitched—Oh, won't you sleep somewhere else, ma'am? I don't like it, somehow—"

"Nonsense!" cried Madame Mirabel, angrily. "Give me the lamp. There's something the matter with the wick, no doubt. I suppose it wants trimming, or cleaning, or seeing to. It is very annoying that both the lamp and the fire should be so obstinate. Remember to have them looked to to-morrow. I can't go without a fire in my room all the winter."

"If you please, ma'am, I think it must be something in the room itself," said Sarah, trembling. "It makes me feel all-overish, like. Do, pray, ma'am, let us make you up a bed in the spare room. I can't 'ardly breathe here, somehow."

"Sarah," said her mistress, sternly, "if you wish to stay with me, you must conquer these absurd fancies. The idea of being frightened because a few logs won't burn, and the lamp begins to flicker! I am quite ashamed of you. Come, just give me the matches. There's a candle somewhere, isn't there? It's on my dressing-table, I think. Good heavens—what's the matter with the woman?"

A sudden shriek from Sarah interrupted Madame Mirabel. She looked the picture of terror. Her face was as white as a ghost's, her eyes were dilated, and her breath came short and quick. At that moment the lamp went out, leaving the two women in total darkness, and the door, which had been left open, banged to violently.

For a second or two neither stirred. Then a cold, hard grip settled itself on the girl's wrist, increasing her fright to frenzy. It was Madame Mirabel's grip. With a strong, swift movement she dragged the half-fainting creature to the door, and opened it. The passage was dark, but there was a glimmer of light in the

entrance-hall down-stairs, and thither they took their way. The gas was still burning in the dining-room, for the cloth had not been removed. Madame Mirabel immediately rang the bell. Sarah, pale and trembling, sank into the nearest chair, too much agitated to speak.

A short, stout, phlegmatic-looking woman, with a broad, stolid face and red hair, soon came tramping heavily into the apartment in answer to the summons. Madame Mirabel eyed her favorably. Here, at any rate, was a person not likely to be scared at nothing. The house-maid, poor hysterical creature, would have to be employed down-stairs in future; it was the cook who must see after the bedroom.

"Cook," said Madame Mirabel, "there is something wrong with the fireplace in my room, and I want you to have it seen to to-morrow. This foolish girl has been terrified out of her life at finding me in the dark. Will you remember?"

"All right, 'm," said the cook, briefly.

"And I want the care of my room to be in your charge," continued Madame Mirabel. "I have a particular reason for this. Just take a light and go up-stairs now, will you, and see that everything is in order. I shall go to bed early to-night, I think."

"For God's sake, ma'am, don't!" cried Sarah, with a look of anguish. "Sleep in the spare room—we can easy make up the bed there, and air the sheets. Oh, ma'am, I do beg and pray of you not to go into that room again to-night!"

"Silence!" said her mistress, sternly. "I will not ask you to go there again yourself, since you are so foolish; but everybody, I trust, is not afraid of the dark. There, go down-stairs into the kitchen, and try to pull yourself together if you can. Cook, see to my room at once. I'm afraid it's no use your trying to light the fire—it won't burn, somehow. But light a lamp, and make everything ready for me to go to bed."

"I'll see to it, 'm," replied the cook, departing.

"And now listen to me," added Madame Mirabel, as soon as she was alone with Sarah. "You have behaved in a most childish and silly manner this evening, and it is a good thing for you that you have such a sensible, strong-minded woman as the cook to sleep with. But I cannot have such an exhibition again, remember. I suppose your head is full of hobgoblin stories, and such-like rubbish. What was the matter with you when you screamed out just now up-stairs?"

"I can't tell you; I can't tell you, not if I was to die for it," moaned Sarah, hiding her face in her apron.

"You can't tell me," repeated Madame Mirabel, scornfully. "No, I dare say you can't. Well, I'm not curious; only don't let there be any more of it, mind. Go down-stairs now, and warm yourself by the kitchen fire until cook comes down again."

Sarah departed, sobbing and trembling, and Madame Mirabel remained for a few minutes alone in the dining-room. A look of stern and thoughtful determination came into her face. "Whatever it is," she muttered to herself, "I will not be conquered. Bah! a puff of wind, an armful of green wood—it must have been green—a bad chimney, a lamp that wants cleaning—are enough to create a perfect regiment of ghosts in the imagination of such idiots as that girl. I *will* sleep there—or know the reason why."

"Your bed's quite ready, 'm," said the cook, looking in.

"Thank you," said Madame Mirabel, turning out the gas with a firm hand. "You can shut up now; and, cook, don't encourage that silly girl to talk."

Then she took her candle, went straight up-stairs, and locked herself securely into the dreadful room.

CHAPTER XVIII

"THEY THINK I WANT A SHEEP-DOG!"

DAME MIRABEL, as our readers are already aware, had always a great walker, as well as a diligent student; and from the she resumed her occupancy of Gorse Cottage she became invaluable in both respects. Were the weather fine or wet, warm d, she never missed her rambles, spending indeed seldom less four, and sometimes even five, hours every day upon the heaths and country roads. Very frequently she was accompanied by Gerard, whose devotion became more marked as time on; sometimes she would even walk with Rosie Chattering, prejudices had long since begun to give way before the fashions of the older woman; occasionally Mr. Palliser himself be her escort. In fact, she never declined a companion if could get one, and her social tendencies—so different from old reserve of former days—together with the real charm and ncy of her conversation, which she skilfully adapted to each she might happen to be with, resulted in her making rapid ce in the good graces of the community. Her little drawing-room became quite a favorite resort, and a very cheerful would gather in it once or twice a week for a cup of Madame el's delicious tea, enlivened by the exquisite tact with which ung widow directed and sustained the dialogue. People got the habit of dropping in, without any invitation, in an informal way, and as Madame Mirabel invariably showed marked nce to the elder ladies who thus honored her, and seemed to l to them even a special welcome, she made sure of every good word. This, again, insured her a welcome at other s, and it was not long before her presence was deemed almost ensable for the success of any coffee-skirmish, tea-tussle, or struggle that might be afoot. As she had acknowledged to friend in the Riviera, she seemed to have imbibed a morbid of solitude. There was no doubt that she had toned down wonderfully since

her husband's death. Even her color had left her; indeed, it was generally remarked that in spite of her wonderful activity she was looking somewhat out of sorts. Her delicate face, pale cheeks, and feverishly bright eyes, all told a tale of unsatisfactory health; and the interest which her fragile appearance gained for her was increased by her frank avowal that she did not sleep well at night. That she was not altogether well was evident; but there was not one of the good ladies that liked her and sympathized with her who had any notion of the secret causes which lay at the root of the altered looks—the nightly struggle with influences she contemned and mocked at—the desperate persistence with which she clung to the supreme aim and object of her life—the fierce, hidden passion that was burning and raging within her. She bore up bravely before the world, threw herself into all the society she could command, and was, in the eyes of her neighbors, a fascinating young widow in delicate health, whose charm of manner and conversation made her a general favorite, who *would* over-exert herself in spite of all her friends could say, who really ought not to take such long walks in all weathers, but whose conduct otherwise was irreproachable; yet when she was alone at night, and safe from the observation of others, there were moments when she almost quailed.

"I confess I did not bargain for this," she would say to herself. "What is it—what can it be? These women, with their invertebrate chatter, I could put up with—that is a small price to pay; but that other thing—that constant, nightly horror—will it conquer me? It never shall. And yet, what is it? I am not nervous; why should I be the subject of illusions? For they *are* illusions—Gaston is as non-existent as the flame of a candle when it has been blown out. I suppose I am nervous after all—unstrung; bah! it is too disgusting. No—I will fight it down; it can't last forever—I shall not always be alone." And then a soft light would come into her eyes, and she would grow pensive; while a stiff chapter of Dr. Bain or some fascinating treatise on the Psychology of Epiphenomena would turn her thoughts into more congenial channels, until the clock struck and she braved her bed-chamber once more.

Her acquaintances now were fairly numerous, but there was one person of whom she had scarcely seen anything since her husband's death. This was Dr. Lancaster. For some time past Lancaster had been living as retired a life as was compatible with the practice

of his profession, and had confined his visits strictly to his patients; he no longer took any part in social gatherings, and whenever by accident he found himself in the society of others he preserved a look of gravity and preoccupation which had never characterized him previously. He had, however, quite dispelled the doubts which had once been felt as to the propriety of his conduct in the case of Mirabel. No doubt it was unfortunate—most unfortunate—that he had not made due provision for the address of letters to him at Lucerne from the outset; at the same time, circumstances had subsequently arisen which no one could possibly have foreseen, and he had returned without losing a moment as soon as ever he heard of his patient's critical state. And if the widow herself was satisfied, surely no one else had any reason to condemn him.

One afternoon in March, when the sky was gray and the wind bleak outside, a party of some half-dozen ladies were gathered round the fire in Mrs. Fullerton's drawing-room, enjoying their tea and talk. Madame Mirabel was there, lying back luxuriously in a large, low easy-chair in the most comfortable corner of the room, whence she contributed her full quota to the conversation. No one, certainly, would have guessed from her appearance that she was not the calm, equable, placid woman she appeared to be; few, in listening to her occasional lively sallies, which sent successive titters of amusement round that matronly and highly proper circle, could have believed that she was not a happy one. The delicate pallor of her complexion, and the feverish sparkle of her blue eyes, imparted that peculiar characteristic to her beauty which can only be expressed by the word "interesting," and enhanced the fascination which even women now experienced in her presence.

"But isn't it very dull for you in that house, my dear?" asked Mrs. Fullerton, the question having been suggested by a remark from somebody to the effect that one or two suspicious-looking characters had been seen loitering about the neighborhood. "It's so isolated, you know. I don't think I should like to live all by myself there at all."

"The fact is I'm not very much at home," replied Madame Mirabel, with a slight laugh. "It seems to me that I live almost as much in other people's houses as in my own. And then I walk a good deal, you must remember. Of course it's a little lonely at night."

"Ah," said Mrs. Fullerton. "Well, I think it's a pity you can't

have some nice, cheerful companion to live with you. There's Miss Tabor, now, she'd make an excellent companion for you; and I dare say she'd be glad to come, for I don't suppose she has much to live upon herself, poor thing. Don't you think, now, that that would be an excellent arrangement for you both?"

"Well," replied Madame Mirabel, meditatively, with a mischievous gleam in her eyes. "Miss Tabor—a middle-aged lady who wears rather strong spectacles, isn't she? I think I have seen her once or twice."

"You certainly might consider it," chimed in Mrs. Chattering, briskly. "I'm sure it would be far better for you than living all alone—better in a number of ways. I had a lady-companion to live with me once, and a very great comfort I found her—a very great comfort indeed. It's true I had to get rid of her eventually, for she used to steal the sugar—oh, she turned out a shocking thief, I'm sorry to say; but of course Miss Tabor wouldn't do that, in fact she never even takes sugar in her tea, as I happen to know, and of course you wouldn't have to pay her very much; but apart from that she really was the very greatest comfort to me—the one I had, I mean—for she never talked, or intruded herself upon me in any way, and was always ready to do little errands for me if I had a headache, or when it rained, you know."

"Your experience almost tempts me to make the trial," observed Madame Mirabel, demurely. "A companion who never talked, and didn't mind going out in the rain, must have been a treasure indeed. Such virtues might even have been allowed to counter-balance her depredations upon the sugar-basin."

"And then, my dear, think of having somebody in the house with you at night, now that there are all these tramps about," said Mrs. Fullerton, impressively. "I've a gardener, you know, who sleeps over my stables. I shouldn't get a wink of sleep if I were alone. It's all very well to be brave and independent, but you ought to have some one with you, my dear, you ought indeed, and I think Miss Tabor's just the person."

"How many tramps do you consider her capable of routing at a time?" inquired Madame Mirabel, laughing.

"H'm! Well, there's always safety in numbers, you know," answered Mrs. Fullerton, slightly disconcerted. "She may not be a very brave person, perhaps, but then she'd give the alarm all the sooner if anything did occur. I hope you are always careful to lock up your plate and things before you go to bed. I always

take mine to bed with me ; it's far safer. I dare say Miss Tabor wouldn't mind doing that herself, now. Then she's a woman of the most excellent principles ; and if *I* say that of anybody you may be perfectly sure that ~~they~~ they are all right."

"Principles," repeated Madame Mirabel, thoughtfully. "Of course that is a most important point. Do you happen to know Miss Tabor's views upon the currency?"

"The what?" exclaimed Mrs. Fullerton.

"The currency," said Madame Mirabel. "I hold very decided opinions upon the subject myself, and it would be too great a risk to take anybody into my house whose ideas were opposed to mine. For all I know, Miss Tabor may be a bi-metallist ; and if she is, we could never live happily under the same roof, could we, now?"

For a moment, the silence which fell upon the party was so complete that Madame Mirabel wondered whether she hadn't carried her audacity just a point too far. However, she was soon reassured.

"I do believe you're laughing at us again, you wicked creature!" cried Mrs. Fullerton, wagging her large forefinger at the offender threateningly. "You'll have to be put in the corner if you're so naughty," continued the good lady, with an elephantine attempt at playfulness. "Well, I suppose you're the best judge of your own affairs, and wilful people must e'en have their way. Come, pass me your cup, and let me give you some more tea. Mrs. Burman, those muffins are hot and fresh. You prefer crumpets, Mrs. Chattering, I know."

Mrs. Fullerton now busied herself with the teapot, and the talk became more general. Madame Mirabel's cup was handed back to her by the lady addressed as Mrs. Burman, who occupied the nearest seat.

"But you're not all alone in the world, are you?" asked Mrs. Burman, in a gentle undertone. "I think I heard some time ago that you had a mother living."

Madame Mirabel colored slightly. "Yes, that is true," she replied in a low voice. "My mother lives quite a recluse existence in London ; she is very old and feeble, and scarcely ever stirs from the house. The atmosphere of London kills me, otherwise I should like to go and live with her ; but you see I have this place on my hands, and I do not think I could let it readily. Of course I see her pretty constantly."

"Dear old lady!" said Mrs. Burman. "I am sure you must be

a great comfort to her. I'm so fond of old ladies ; they're always so sweet and beautiful, I think, with their gentle manners and soft white hair. My own dear mother died three years ago," she added, with a sigh. "One seldom knows the value of one's parents till they are taken from us, I often think ; and then it is too late to cherish them, isn't it?"

"It is, rather," replied Madame Mirabel.

"Well, it is a great blessing for you that you have such a dear, sweet mother still with you," continued Mrs. Burman, "and I am sure you must feel thankful for the privilege. I hope she has all her little comforts in her old age, and nice, kind people to wait upon her. And so she lives in London. What—a—neighborhood, now, may I ask?"

"A very quiet neighborhood—a sort of park," replied Madame Mirabel, who remembered having heard Mrs. Burman spoken of as the greatest gossip in the place, in spite of her insinuating ways. "Well, I must be going ; it will be dark before I get home, even now. Will you come and drink tea with me on Friday? Mrs. Fullerton is coming, and one or two more, I think."

The invitation was readily accepted, and Madame Mirabel rose to make her adieus. It was nearly dark when she left the house, and the wind blew fresh and strong over the common ; but she was well wrapped up, and, enjoying the pure, cold air, did not seem in any hurry to reach home. A low laugh escaped her as she walked leisurely on her way. "That was a delightful joke about Miss Tabbor," she said softly to herself. "They evidently think I want a sheep-dog, like Mrs. Crawley. I suppose they would like to get a spy into the house, who would gossip with the servants and tell them everything I say and do." The idea seemed to divert her vastly, for she dwelt upon it for some moments with keen relish. Another ripple of amusement passed over her lips as she recalled Mrs. Burman's attempts to pump her about her mother. "The dear, gentle, white-haired old lady !" she murmured under her breath. "What a pity she wasn't there to hear such a description of herself !"

A sound of wheels approaching from behind interrupted her flow of thought. She turned her head, and perceived the flashing lamps of a dog-cart. The next moment it had overtaken her, and she immediately recognized the occupant. It was Dr. Lancaster.

"Why, Madame Mirabel ! Is that you?" he exclaimed, pulling up.

She answered not a word, but stopped in her walk and waited.

"You can drive home," said Lancaster, throwing the reins to his servant. He jumped down and joined her. "You are out late," he said, as they shook hands. "I'll walk home with you if you don't mind."

"Thank you," she said, quietly. "I have scarcely seen you since I returned."

"No — I've been very busy," he replied, as they walked slowly on through the gathering darkness. "I've had much to do and much to think about. How are you getting on?"

"Well, I don't lead a very eventful life, as you may suppose," she replied in a low tone. "Of course I'm lonely. But that was to be expected. I have nothing to complain of, otherwise."

"But I hear of you everywhere," said Lancaster, smiling. "You seem to have plenty of friends, at any rate."

"Friends!" repeated Madame Mirabel, with a slight scornful laugh.

"They mean kindly" replied Lancaster, "and I have been glad to hear that you respond to their advances. I should be sorry to think you were leading an absolutely solitary existence."

"Oh yes, they are very good to me, I am sure," she said with a touch of weariness. "It is not their fault that they cannot fill my life. But tell me about yourself. You have been busy, I know — otherwise you might possibly have found time to come and see me, I suppose."

Lancaster paused for a moment. "Yes, I have been busy," he said, seriously. "But that is not altogether the reason why I have not been to call upon you. Apart from my actual duties, my mind has been entirely absorbed by what I call the Lucerne mystery. It weighs upon me more heavily than I can tell you, and seems in a fair way to take possession of me altogether. I shall never rest till I have probed it to the very bottom."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Mirabel faintly. "And have you discovered nothing — nothing whatever?"

"Nothing whatever," he replied.

"It's very strange," she observed, as though deep in thought. "I should have imagined that the telegraph-people would have been able to trace that telegram somehow. There must be something very defective in the system."

"Yes," said Lancaster. "And of course Bretschneider could throw no light upon it. I never saw a man so utterly astounded as

he was when I arrived in Bologna and told him I had come all the way from England in response to a telegram from himself. He had sent no such telegram. There had been no possibility of any conference being arranged, for De Véranges was in Paris at the time, and one of the Italian surgeons — not Semenza, but the other — I forget his name — was laid up with fever. Who, then, can have sent it? Who knew anything about the proposed conference, to begin with? And what interest had anybody in committing a fraud to insure my presence in Lucerne just then? The more I think of it the more insoluble the mystery becomes. And when I think of the terrible consequences of the crime — for crime it was —

He paused, his breast heaving with emotion. Madame Mirabel remained silent for a moment or two; then she said, very gently:

"Dear Dr. Lancaster, you cannot possibly feel more strongly about this unhappy business than I do; I would give half I'm worth to be able to clear it up. But I cannot help remembering that the mischief is irrevocable, and that if you were to discover the entire truth to-morrow it could never bring my husband back to life. Why, then, persist in dwelling upon a matter which is a source of such unhappiness to you — which seems to be imbittering your life, and even undermining your health? I do not deny that there may be duties we owe the dead, but surely the interests of the living should be predominant. I know how unselfish you are; for my sake, then, try and put this thing away. It pains *me* to see you sacrificing your happiness to this sense of wrong. I do not ask you to give up all hope or effort, for, as you say, the criminal ought to be punished; but don't let it gain the mastery over you as it is doing now. Put the whole business into the hands of the detectives, and try and forget all about it in the meantime."

"If I only could," he muttered, gloomily.

"You must try," she continued. "And if ever you do hear anything, of course you will come and let me know at once. Two heads are often better than one, and between us I dare say we shall be able to make something out of it. I wonder you never thought of the detectives."

"I communicated with the police soon after I returned, but there has been no result hitherto," said Lancaster.

"Well, then, we must just wait," replied Madame Mirabel. "These things often take a long time to unravel, and no doubt they are investigating the affair in their own way. Have you never heard

again from that old Lucerne doctor who gave you so many clever hints about it?"

"No," said Lancaster, smiling a little at the recollection. "He was certainly an original, that old fellow. Well," he continued in an easier tone, "it has been a great comfort to me to speak to you like this. I have wanted to do so for some time, but I always went on hoping that I might have something to tell you, and so put off coming. I am glad I happened to fall in with you to-night."

"Ah, so am I—very glad indeed," she murmured softly.

They walked along for a short time silently. Both seemed deep in thought. At last Madame Mirabel said, with a slight laugh:

"I wish you had been at Mrs. Fullerton's this afternoon. The good lady seems to think that it is not proper for me to live alone, and is very anxious that I should take Miss Tabor as a companion."

"Miss Tabor!" exclaimed Lancaster, amused.

"She is a most respectable person, I believe," resumed Madame Mirabel, "and for a moment I scarcely knew what objection to make to her. I was driven at length to insinuate doubts of her orthodoxy on the question of bimetallism, which was at once accepted as a sufficient excuse. I scarcely expected to find such very open minds among the people hereabouts."

"I can believe anything of you after that," he said, laughing heartily. "And yet, seriously, I am sorry that you *should* be living alone. It can't be good for you; it isn't good for anybody."

"And yet you live alone yourself," she remarked.

"Ah, yes; but I can scarcely help it," he replied.

"No more can I," she retorted gayly. "We're alike in that respect. But I suppose there is no reason why we shouldn't meet occasionally."

"You don't mind my coming to see you sometimes, then?" asked Lancaster.

"I think I should mind it more if you didn't," replied Madame Mirabel, gently.

By this time they were getting near the cottage, and their steps slackened almost unconsciously.

"I suppose you see a good deal of the Pallisers?" said Lancaster.

"Oh yes," she replied, carelessly. "Gerard is generally at hand when he's wanted; sometimes, even, when—"

"Come, that's too bad," interrupted Lancaster, smiling. "I must say I like young Palliser. There's good stuff in him, in

spite of all his pessimistic nonsense. And his parents are a delightful old couple in their way. They seem to me to be all heart."

"Very little head, certainly," said Madame Mirabel, who did not feel much interest in the Pallisers at that particular moment.

"You are incorrigible," he rejoined. "Positively I dread to think what you may say of *me* sometimes, for I can scarcely have a greater claim upon your indulgence than those good people have."

His tone put her upon her guard. "Don't think I am ungrateful to them," she replied. "I know that they are kindness itself. I have a bad habit of saying things like that, and I wish I hadn't, for I feel that I thereby misrepresent myself. You are not serious, either, in supposing that I ever speak of you in your absence."

"Do you never do so?" he asked.

"Never," she said, briefly. "It is only one's most ordinary friends who may be made the subject of general conversation."

Lancaster shot an involuntary glance at her, though it was too dark for him to see the expression of her face. He was silent for a moment or two, and then said, quietly:

"Thank you. And you intend to stay on here?"

"For the present, certainly," she replied. "I do not see that I should be better off elsewhere, and I have no wish to travel."

"Perhaps you are wise," said Lancaster. "I am glad you are not going away. I should be very sorry to lose sight of you. And no one need be dull who has friends, books, and an object in life. You might accomplish much, with your energy and intellectual gifts."

"An object in life!" repeated Madame Mirabel, thoughtfully. "Yes—that is a great thing, of course. And do you really think me capable of attaining any object on which I had set my heart?"

"I think," said Lancaster, "that you are too clever and too clear-sighted to set your heart on any object that you could not accomplish, under ordinary circumstances."

"That sounds a little enigmatical," she answered, with a slow smile. "All I am sure of is that, had I a cherished object, nothing should stand in the way of my accomplishing it. I have determination and resources, if I have nothing else."

"You have more than that," said Lancaster. "I believe you have a substratum of goodness in you that you are almost unconscious of. You give too free a play to a sort of surface cynicism

which belies your real nature. One would think to hear you talk sometimes that in your view goodness is always associated with weakness. Nothing could be a greater mistake. I consider that you yourself are a living proof to the contrary. No one can doubt your strength, and I believe that you are as good as you are strong."

"You would almost tempt me to believe in myself!" exclaimed Madame Mirabel, laughing softly.

"I want you to," replied Lancaster. "Self-scepticism is one of the most mischievous forms of unbelief."

"I am glad that you believe in me, at any rate," she said in a low voice.

They parted at the corner a few moments afterwards, Madame Mirabel peremptorily refusing to allow him to escort her farther. He renewed his promise to visit her before long, and, with a quiet word of farewell, walked swiftly in the other direction. Then there came a light into Madame Mirabel's eye, and a flush into her cheek, as she slowly pursued her way, which for a minute or two made her look almost like her former self. Her heart bounded, and a sense of ineffable satisfaction, of certain though as yet unaccomplished victory, stole over her. Rapidly she reconnoitred her position. She was free—absolutely and entirely her own mistress. She had no incumbrances—there was nothing, there was nobody, who could exercise the slightest restraint upon her actions. She was in comfortable circumstances, and therefore able to use her freedom without anxiety or hinderance. And she was powerful—she felt it. All her shrewdness, all her tact, all her arts of attraction, of allurements, were now to be pressed into the service, were now to co-operate towards bringing about the one great object of her life, that thing to procure which she had struggled and suffered and sinned, and which would soon be within her reach. And to that object everything else should bow. The whole world was no more than a dead leaf to her, in comparison with the love of this one man.

As she turned in at the gate, and began to walk up the heather-skirted path that led to the house, she was suddenly struck with the bright appearance of the windows. There were lights in the dining-room, lights in the drawing-room, and lights in the spare room up-stairs. Evidently something unusual was afoot.

"If you please, ma'am, there's a lady in the drawing-room," said Sarah, as she opened the hall-door.

"A lady?" echoed Madame Mirabel, astonished.

"Yes, ma'am; and I think she's come to stay," added the girl, "for she's got two trunks with her, and I've put them up in the spare room. Wasn't you expecting no one, ma'am?"

Madame Mirabel was too much taken aback to reply. What could this "lady" be, who had calmly installed herself in the house during her absence, and made herself so very much at home? Here was something that must be seen to at once—something that might mean embarrassment at the very outset. She walked pettishly past the girl, flung open the drawing-room door, and entered.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNEXPECTED GUEST

"WHAT—*mother!*" she exclaimed, in almost incredulous amazement.

Even so. There was no mistaking that gaunt, lank figure—that worn, green velvet bonnet, those shabby gloves, that well-known look of pretentious, decayed gentility. Mrs. Jickling had been seated in an arm-chair by the fireside, comforting herself with a cup of tea. She now rose, with her very finest and most tragic air.

"Yes, Julia," she moaned, "it's me and no one else. What! I've given you a bit of a surprise, have I? Yet where *should* a woman find a refuge, if not in the bosom of her own children? The world's just breakin' up around me, Julia, and, like the man in the play, I've come to lay my bones with you at last."

"What in the world is the matter?" asked Madame Mirabel, whose expression at that moment was certainly not suggestive of any impulsive desire to present her bosom as a refuge for her mother's bones. "Do you mean to tell me that you've come down here for good?"

"I might 'ave known it!" ejaculated Mrs. Jickling, flinging herself into her chair again, and applying a very crumpled handkerchief to her eyes. "Why didn't I go to the work'us? Why did I come 'ere to be flouted by the daughter as I nursed and pampered from an infant? I've not been much trouble to you, Julia, all these years—no one can say you've seen too much of me; and now when everything's in ruins, and I've been swindled out of every crust in the cupboard, and not a roof to cover me—"

"Come, mother, don't cry; tell me all about it," said Madame Mirabel, seating herself at the opposite side of the fireplace. "Of course I was surprised to see you; I had no idea you were coming. But never mind that now. What is it that has happened?"

Thus adjured, Mrs. Jickling suffered herself to be appeased. She sniffed pathetically once or twice, unpinned her green satin bonnet-

strings, threw them carefully back over her shoulders, and gave her bonnet a dexterous tilt upward; then, folding her hands, replied:

"Well, Julia, since you're good enough to ask me, I will divulge the truth. I'm a ruined woman! The Incorruptible 'as shut its doors, and swindled me out of every blessed penny I put into it—every penny, I tell you! Naked came I into this world, Julia, and naked I shall go out of it."

"People generally do," said Madame Mirabel. "But what's the Incorruptible?"

"What's the Incorruptible?" echoed her mother, rather snapshily. "Why, the Annuity Office, to be sure. Didn't you know as I'd got an annuity of a 'undred pounds a year in the Incorruptible and Something Annuity Office in Pancake Lane? No; I dare say your own mother's affairs aren't worth remembering. However, that's the fact, and now I haven't a sixpence in my pocket to cross for luck."

"You mean that the Annuity Office has failed," repeated Madame Mirabel, her lips tightening, "and that your income has come to an end. That is bad news. Have you absolutely nothing left?"

"Well, I've got my pension," grumbled Mrs. Jickling, "but that don't amount to much. One can't live on a handful o' shillin's a week at my age. I must 'ave my little comforts, you know, and it's not as if I'd been a workin'-woman all my life, able to put up with anything. People as is accustomed to bein' genteel, and waited on, and looked up to in their neighborhood, even though the neighborhood *is* a low one, can't come down to scrubbin' floors without a pang o' shame, Julia, say what they will. Ah, it's a weariful world, my girl, though *you've* no reason to complain; some folks is born lucky, as I said to you once before, and it's a mercy, after all, as this thing 'as happened now, instead of when you 'ad your hands full with that poor man of yours as is now in a better world."

Madame Mirabel felt half beside herself with rage and mortification. The position of affairs was now clear enough. The Incorruptible Annuity Office had failed, and Mrs. Jickling, being left virtually destitute, had come to quarter herself in Gorse Cottage for good. What was to be done? How could she get rid of this terribly inconvenient and unwelcome guest? It was impossible that the two should live together. It was impossible that she should introduce her mother to the society of Hindhead. And

yet it was equally impossible to turn her out of doors. For the moment she was entirely nonplussed.

"And what do you propose to do?" she asked, in as steady a voice as she could command.

"Perhaps you could advise me," replied Mrs. Jickling, with a meaning glance at her daughter. "You're a clever one, you know; for myself, I'm just at my wits' end. I s'pose you can give me a shake-down for to-night, anyhow."

A wicked and mischievous inspiration flashed across the daughter's mind. "Certainly," she said. "Of course you must stay here for the present, until we can form some permanent plan for the future. *You shall sleep in my room*, and I will take the spare room for a time."

"As you please," replied Mrs. Jickling, "though why I should turn you out of your own bed I don't see. Why shouldn't I sleep in the spare room, bein' an intruder, so to speak?"

"It's not quite ready for visitors," said Madame Mirabel, "and I can rough it better than you can. In my room you'll find everything ready to hand. Just excuse me a minute, will you, while I go up-stairs to arrange matters a little. I shall be down again directly, and then you'll be able to make yourself comfortable before dinner."

It would evidently not do to quarrel with her mother, but there might be other ways of making her dissatisfied with the house. Besides, thought Madame Mirabel, as she dragged the two trunks from one room to the other, and hastily collected the few toilet articles she would require from her own dressing-table, she might herself get a better night's rest in another room than she had had lately. But what a terrible business it was, at the best! Had her mother suddenly arrived on a visit only, it would have been bad enough; for even then it would have been impossible to prevent her meeting some, at any rate, of her neighbors, and a less convenient and presentable guest could scarcely have been forced upon her; but that she should have come to stay—to live in the house forever—to be always there, always in the way, always to be considered, and provided for, and reckoned with—the thing was monstrous; it never could and it never should be. She would make almost any pecuniary sacrifice to avert such a contingency.

Mrs. Jickling went up-stairs to put herself to rights, as she expressed it, and came down again in a cap which filled even Sarah with amaze. Madame Mirabel bit her lip viciously, but said nothing.

I dare say you won't expect me to dress very much, considerin' my circumstances," remarked Mrs. Jickling, "'specially as you're in such deep mournin' yourself. I must say, Julia, that widow's cap becomes you wonderful. Quite in the latest style, I suppose. There is some women as looks uncommonly genteel in black an' white."

There is no knowing how Mrs. Jickling herself might have looked had she ever affected those sober hues; her taste, however, lay in the direction of somewhat brighter colors, and was now displaying itself in a showy crimson bow, fastened with a large cornelian brooch, and a variegated head-dress that might have put even Joseph's coat to shame. Madame Mirabel wondered whether she would be able to effect some modification in her mother's toilet, and get her to abandon that dreadful bow in favor of some fresh white frilling; for the poor woman's complexion stood in sore need of some such relief, being of that rather turbid hue which is apt to look almost dirty when bordered by any unwashable material. The bow, and the cap, and the worn alpaca dress, garnished at the wrist with cheap bracelets instead of clean white ruffs, formed a *tout ensemble* which made Madame Mirabel shudder, and she silently resolved that some alteration was absolutely necessary before any visitors were admitted.

Of the two women it was certainly Mrs. Jickling who enjoyed her dinner the more. The spotless table-linen, the bright silver, the lights, the service, the simple yet daintily-cooked dishes, formed a marked contrast to the sordid arrangements in Augusta Victoria villas, and made a great impression on her mind. This, indeed, was refinement; this was real "gentility"—the gentility after which she hankered—and great was her enjoyment of it. But with the enjoyment came envy. What, after all, had Julia done, that she should possess such luxuries? Had she ever struggled and worked and pinched as her mother had been forced to do? Why should the daughter live in such rich clover while her parent was in dust and stubble? The thought of it almost poisoned her pleasure, while it occurred to her that—perhaps—the old arduous days might now be gone forever; that the loss of her poor annuity might prove a blessing in disguise; that Julia, with her spare bedrooms, and well-appointed table, and certain income, could scarcely turn her out to live on a few shillings a week. The present, at any rate, was agreeable; for the future, she would wait and scheme.

"There are three or four people coming in to afternoon tea on Friday," remarked Madame Mirabel after a pause, as she laid down her knife and fork.

"Company, eh?" said Mrs. Jickling. "Ah, it's many a year since I was able to have company in my own house. With your income, of course, you can afford it. Tip-top people you 'ave hereabouts, I expect. And whose coming, if I might inquire?"

"Well—I can only tell you their names, and that will scarcely enlighten you very much," replied Madame Mirabel, dryly. "They are elderly ladies, who live in the neighborhood—Mrs. Fullerton, Mrs. Chattering, Mrs. Burman, Mrs. Palliser, and perhaps another or two. There's nothing very particular about them."

"Carriage people?" asked Mrs. Jickling, critically.

"I believe Mrs. Burman keeps a donkey-cart for her children," said Madame Mirabel with much gravity, "and I've seen Mrs. Fullerton in a vehicle of some sort once or twice. But I don't think they'll bring their carriages with them on Friday. People walk here, mostly."

"Oh, indeed," said Mrs. Jickling, somewhat mystified.

Afterwards, when the servant had retired, leaving the decanters on the table, Madame Mirabel said:

"By-the-way, mother, I think you have heard the name of Lancaster, have you not?"

"Lancaster!" repeated Mrs. Jickling, glancing quickly at her.

"Let me give you a glass of port," said Madame Mirabel. "It is rather a nice wine, I think. Yes—Lancaster. You remember the name, don't you?"

Mrs. Jickling nodded her head a great many times, with a look in which cunning and curiosity seemed to strive for the upper-hand. "Yes, I remember the name, Julia—though I don't know anything about it, mind; I'm as much in the dark as a child of six months old, and always have been. Well, what about 'Lancaster'?"

"Simply this, that you may possibly meet a gentleman of that name while you are here," replied Madame Mirabel coolly, "and so I thought it as well to mention the fact. The identity of the name would be sure to have struck you, and you might have looked startled or taken aback on hearing it. Just bear in mind that you know nothing of him, and that he never even heard of you; that's all."

"Julia," said Mrs. Jickling, as she delicately moistened her lips

from the finger-bowl, "I know nothing of anybody named Lancaster, and wish to know nothing; neither am I acquainted with your private affairs. I'm not of a curious disposition; and as for bein' afraid I should start, or stare, or do anything foolish of that sort, I can only remind you that I was not born the day before yesterday. Who is this Mr. Lancaster, if I may make so bold?"

"One of the medical men of the place," replied Madame Mirabel, carelessly. "Won't you have some almonds and raisins?"

"If there is anything I'm partial to, it is almonds and raisins with a glass o' good port-wine," said poor Mrs. Jickling, who had not enjoyed such creature comforts for years. "And you always have late dinner, I suppose. What do you do of an evening, now, when you're all by yourself?"

"Well, I generally read," answered Madame Mirabel. "And as I manage to walk a good deal during the day, I'm always ready for bed when the time comes. There are plenty of books about the house, if you care to look at them."

"You always were a reader," remarked Mrs. Jickling. "Yes, I'll see what books you 'ave some time to-morrow, when I feel settled down a bit. I'll tell you what, though, Julia, you're not lookin' 'alf so well as you ought to. You've lost all your color, and it seems to me you've been losin' flesh, too. You haven't been out o' sorts, 'ave you?"

"Not in the least," said Madame Mirabel. "Of course I've had a trying time. "But I'm strong enough. Won't you have another glass of port?"

The evening passed heavily enough. Mrs. Jickling, overcome by the genial warmth of the room, combined, perhaps, with the natural effects of the good cheer she had been enjoying, began to nod, and was soon peacefully asleep by the fireside. Madame Mirabel essayed to read, but her attention was distracted partly by the elder lady's somewhat strident snores, and partly by the annoyance and perplexity in which her mother's arrival had placed her. She had thought, for a moment, of writing to put off the friends she expected on Friday. But that would have been to capitulate. If it were decreed that Mrs. Burman should meet the original of the portrait she had sketched — the real prototype of the dear, white-haired, gentle old lady — well, let it be so. Madame Mirabel was too proud a woman to acknowledge even to herself that she might wince; still less was she capable of stooping before the worthy people she despised, or suffering them to

suspect for a moment the exasperation she really felt. She had no apprehensions with regard to the possible meeting of her mother and Dr. Lancaster, for neither knew the other by sight; at the same time she was conscious that she would feel humiliated on presenting the doctor to so very undesirable a relative, and was troubled, moreover, at the probable interference with her liberty of action which the presence of that relative might involve. However, it was useless to brood over the inevitable. She must trust to her native diplomacy, as long as her mother remained, to tide over all the difficulties that might present themselves, and, meanwhile, must set to work to devise some plan for the old woman's permanent establishment elsewhere.

It was a matter of some trouble to get Mrs. Jickling up-stairs to bed that night, so overcome was the poor woman with drowsiness. The task was eventually accomplished, however, about ten o'clock, and Madame Mirabel, after seeing her safe into her chamber, sought her own bed in the spare room. She laid her head upon the pillow with a sigh. Only five hours before, how bright had been her prospects; now, how suddenly, how unexpectedly, had they been overcast! A sense of physical weariness came over her, and she closed her eyes in hopes of the greatly needed sleep. Here, in this room at any rate, she thought, she would be unmolested. Why, she asked herself, had she not moved into the spare room earlier — from the very first? Was it pride that had prevented her — a feeling of self-scorn for the weakness from which she suffered — an iron determination to resist the horror, to vanquish it and drive it off, to vindicate the strength of her nerves and the truth of her materialism at the hazard of her very reason if need were? Yes, it was all this, but there was something more. There was an irresistible *fascination* for her in that other room. She hated it and loathed it, and yet the attraction of it was so powerful that she found herself compelled to occupy it in spite of everything. She would stand by the bed, and call up to the eye of her imagination the prostrate figure of her dying husband. She would rehearse again and again the incidents of his last few weeks of life, until the illusion grew so strong that she felt as though the months were flowing backward, and that she was living through the experiences of that awful epoch a second time. And then the horror would fall upon her. She would have given worlds to sleep elsewhere, but she could not. The feeling that the room was empty and waiting for her drove her back to it night after

night. That was the strange thing about this woman—she suffered agonies, but she never flinched. Nor did she fear. In spite of the horrors which seemed to encompass her and penetrate her in that room she turned, as it were, her face to the foe, and defied it. But the struggle was wearing her out. She knew that she wanted a respite, and the arrival of her mother afforded her the desired opportunity. She resolved to put Mrs. Jickling into the fatal chamber, and see what came of it.

She dozed off at last, and slept soundly for three hours. Then she woke up suddenly, with an instinctive feeling that there was something wrong. She held her breath, and listened. Everything was still; the wind had dropped, and there was not a sound in the house. Then came the old, dreaded, irresistible impulse to go into the other room, coupled with an intense desire to see whether anything had happened to her mother. She lay motionless and obstinate for some fifteen or twenty minutes, battling with the imperious power that was coercing her—daring it to do its worst. At last she turned her head, and glanced across the room. In a moment she saw that the door, which she had carefully shut on retiring, now stood wide open.

It was a feeling of desperation rather than of despair which took possession of her upon this discovery. Defy the unknown thing that was pursuing her as she might, it was proving itself too strong for her. She knitted her brows and set her teeth hard, vowing that she would not give in. And she withstood it bravely. Here the native strength and clearness of her mind afforded her great assistance. The sensation of horror which even she was unable entirely to resist was partially neutralized by the exasperation she felt at her utter inability to account for facts the actuality of which she could not deny. She was perplexed and baffled, and her anger at finding herself thus confronted by a mystery as impenetrable as it was ridiculous aided her in her struggle against the creeping terrors which assailed her so remorselessly. Determined to investigate the phenomenon, she sprang from her bed and grasped the handle of the door.

Of course she discovered nothing. The lock worked as usual, and the key was still in it, on the inner side. Then came the impulse over her once more with overwhelming force, and this time it was irresistible. She knew and felt that to keep up the struggle would be useless. A will stronger even than her own had taken her at a disadvantage, and was impelling her to do that which she

had determined that she would not do. The next moment she had passed out onto the landing, and was moving with stealthy, silent steps towards the chamber where her mother lay.

The sun was shining brightly, and there was a faint, sweet breath of premature spring in the atmosphere, as Mrs. Jickling descended the staircase about half-past eight o'clock, and entered the breakfast-room. Mrs. Jickling was not one of those persons who look to advantage early in the day. She had not that air of morning freshness about her which suggests the use of a cold tub, and is partly, at any rate, the result of a predilection for soap and water, immaculate linen, and clean caps. On the contrary, it must be confessed that her appearance was distinctly dingy; her brown merino dress was ungraced by cuffs or collar, her black-net cap had evidently seen more service than ought to have been demanded of it, and the wisp of ribbon which edged her neck would have been better behind the fire. Mrs. Jickling looked rather cross when she first came down, but the expression of her face relaxed at the sight of the well-spread breakfast-table and the cheerful blaze at which she warmed her hands. There was no doubt that Julia knew how to make herself comfortable, and Mrs. Jickling intended to reap the benefit of her late ruin to the fullest possible extent.

In a few minutes Madame Mirabel appeared. She looked pale and ill, with dark rings around her eyes. Mrs. Jickling scanned her curiously.

"Well, Julia," she said, "I can't compliment you on your color. What 'ave you been doin' to yourself? You look for all the world like a body as 'as been buried and dug up again, I declare if you don't. You haven't got a headache, have you?"

"I am perfectly well, thank you," replied Madame Mirabel, as she seated herself at the breakfast-table and began to make the tea. "I don't sleep very well just now—that's all. I hope you had a good night?"

"Pretty fair," said Mrs. Jickling, in a doubtful tone. "Lor, what lovely cups you 'ave got, to be sure! They must 'ave cost a pretty penny, I'll be bound. Well, I didn't sleep as well as I generally do, either. There's something unhealthy in the air, I suspect. I had bad dreams."

"Perhaps you dined too late," remarked Madame Mirabel.

"I dunno what it was," rejoined the old woman, fretfully. "Some-

thing must 'ave set my nerves agog, for all the time I was undressin' I could 'a sworn there was somebody behind me. I got that nervous after a bit I couldn't 'a looked round was it ever so. I don't know what it could 'a been, I'm sure ; something wrong with the drains, perhaps. By-the-bye, your servants don't none of 'em walk in their sleep, do they?"

"Not that I am aware of," said Madame Mirabel calmly. "Why?"

"Because I could take my oath there was somebody in my room last night," replied Mrs. Jickling, nodding her head and frowning portentously at her daughter. "I was asleep at the time, but I heard a rustling sound as woke me up, an' I peered out just in time to see somethin' white disappearin' through the door. I'm no coward, as you very well know, Julia, and of course it *may* 'a been a dream, one can't tell ; but I will say this, that it was the most life-like dream as ever 'appened to me, and if it wasn't one o' the servants—"

"Make your mind easy," said Madame Mirabel, with a cold smile. "I looked in myself once, to see that you were comfortable. It must have been I whom you saw. I had no idea that I disturbed you."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Jickling, who was not accustomed to such displays of filial tenderness.

"I am always rather restless at night," replied Madame Mirabel, "and often walk about a little. It never occurred to me that you might take me for a ghost."

"You look like one now, anyhow," said Mrs. Jickling rather sharply. "There's something the matter with you, Julia, though you won't own it. What makes you look that white and drawn, and sends you wanderin' about the house in the middle o' the night for all the world like a doomed soul? I tell you what, Julia, it's a good thing for you as I've come to live with you, for if anybody wanted lookin' after *you* do—there's no mistake about that. Are you ailin' any way, or 'ave you got something on your mind?"

"As regards your residence here, that can be discussed later," said Madame Mirabel, white with suppressed rage. "I have told you that I am not ill, and require no looking after. Let me give you some of this omelet."

Mrs. Jickling felt that she had made a mistake, and continued for the next few minutes to eat in silence. Nothing, in fact, that she could have said would have been better calculated to strengthen Madame Mirabel's determination to find another residence for

her at the earliest possible opportunity. The speech had made it impossible to keep her at Gorse Cottage. She was not only in the way; she evidently had all the instincts of a spy, and Madame Mirabel did not intend to have a spy about her if she could help it.

"I dare say you would like to rest this morning," she said at last, when breakfast was drawing to a close. "We can go out this afternoon if you feel inclined. Meanwhile I think it would be advisable for us to go through your wardrobe, and see if some of your gowns don't want seeing to a little. I suppose you have brought them all with you?"

"Oh yes," replied Mrs. Jickling, briskly. "There ain't so many of 'em but what I could get 'em all into two trunks, and they'd be all the better of a little overhauling. You was always clever with your needle, Julia, though you never did take kindly to needle-work as a girl, and if you can make my things a little more ship-shape than they are I won't say but what I'll take it kind of you."

"Very well, then," assented Madame Mirabel. "We'll set to work at once, and see if we can't smarten them up a bit. I dare say there are some things you won't require any more. This afternoon we can walk to Haslemere, and get any trifles that may be necessary for you. To-night," she added, "you can sleep in the spare room, and I will go back to my own."

She knew that her experiment had been a failure.

CHAPTER XX

MRS. JICKLING MAKES AN IMPRESSION

Now Sarah the house-maid, after the manner of house-maids, was on particularly confidential terms with a certain fascinating young gentleman who called every day at Gorse Cottage on behalf of the local butcher; and one consequence of this intimacy was that the news of Mrs. Jickling's arrival spread all over the neighborhood in the course of a very few hours. The intelligence was further seasoned by the expression of Sarah's opinion that her mistress's parent was "a queer sort;" a phrase which was variously interpreted according to the idiosyncracies of each person to whose ears it came, so that the abstract queerness of the new-comer took a score of different phases in the concrete, all more or less conflicting, and much curiosity was felt in consequence. Among Madame Mirabel's own friends the astonishment of course was great. It was impossible, they argued, that she could have been ignorant of her mother's impending arrival; how strange, then, that she should never have mentioned it, especially when she was being so strongly recommended to engage Miss Tabor as her companion! Mrs. Fullerton shook her head very portentously as she discussed the matter with Mrs. Chattering; and Mrs. Chattering (who had never taken quite so cordially to Madame Mirabel as the other ladies had) shook hers more portentously even than Mrs. Fullerton, with the significant remark that of course there was something in it, but that in such cases nobody could ever tell; while Mrs. Burman increased the excitement by saying that Madame Mirabel had assured her, the very day the event took place, that her mother was quite an aged, feeble old lady with the most beautiful white hair, who lived a retired life near one of the London parks, and never went out of the house!

"Why, I never even knew she had a mother," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, looking perfectly bewildered, when her husband came in with the news. "Now why should she have kept it such a secret all this time?"

"Indeed, mother, you did know it—I told you of it myself," said Gerard, looking up from his book.

"Never, my dear," said the good lady, with an emphatic gesture. "This is the first I've heard of it. How is it I've not the slightest recollection of such a thing, pray, if you ever told me of it, I should like to know?"

"It's because you have such a bad memory," replied Gerard, as he resumed his reading. "I told you of it the day after father met her going to Stockwell, and you remarked what a queer neighborhood it was for her mother to live in."

"Well, you may say so if you choose, my dear," retorted Mrs. Palliser briskly, "but it's just as likely that you *imagine* you told me as it is that I've *forgotten* it—more likely, indeed, if it comes to that. However, I'm going to tea with her on Friday, and then, no doubt, I shall see this Mrs. Jickling for myself."

The Pallisers were in excellent spirits at this time, for things were looking very prosperous with the Non-Intoxicating Liquor Association, and the shares were actually quoted at a premium. There was a spurt, too, in the share-market generally, a sort of reaction after the alarming depression that had occurred in the autumn, which was very pleasant for everybody concerned. It is true that there were a few over-prudent people who shook their heads, and talked about clouds on the horizon, and growled that it was all too good to last; but Mr. Palliser took a more cheerful view of the situation, and lent a far readier ear to those who prophesied smooth things than to the croakers, as he was wont to call them in his good easy way. The old lady, meanwhile, had been growing gradually feebler, and there seemed little reason to doubt that a very few months would elapse before the inevitable end.

Madame Mirabel carried out her projected invasion of Mrs. Jickling's wardrobe with a thoroughness which considerably alarmed that lady. She divided her mother's apparel into two heaps—one consisting of such things as might be done something with, the other of articles which in her judgment did not come under that category. Among the latter were three caps—including those which Mrs. Jickling had already worn since her arrival—and a variety of the strangest odds and ends in the way of frippery, such as wisps of greasy velvet, "bows" of startling pattern and prismatic tints, bead bracelets which laid bare an indecent proportion of elastic, and other treasures of the same sort. Mrs. Jick-

ling had a vague notion that these were being carefully put aside to be done up into more fashionable shapes ; that the caps were destined for a new and brighter career of usefulness and beauty, and her cherished store of ribbons and tags and beads reserved for an equally desirable process of transformation. When, therefore, Madame Mirabel, without a word of warning or explanation, put the entire rubbish-heap upon the fire, with her best company-cap on the top, the poor old woman emitted a shriek that was heard in the very basement. It was, however, too late ; her treasures were consumed in a few seconds, and for some hours she was a forlorn and capless mortal, bereft of all the outward and visible signs of her innate "gentility," and bemoaning the loss of her adornments in strains now pathetic, now morose. She was only partially appeased when Madame Mirabel walked her down to Haslemere that afternoon—just as it was getting dusk—in order to repair the damage. Julia, she thought, having destroyed her property without consulting her, might at least have let her have a say in the purchases that were to replace it. But no, she wouldn't. Not in a single instance did she offer Mrs. Jickling a choice. And Julia's taste was so peculiar, too. She bought nothing but collars and waistbands, with frillings and twillings by the yard—any amount of such things ; not an inch of ribbon of any color ; not a knick-knack of any sort, and she so fond of knick-knacks, too ; while as for the caps, well, they weren't so bad, perhaps, but far too Quakerish for Mrs. Jickling's taste ; white, they were, with the barest dash of color here and there, but not a flower about them ; a severity which Mrs. Jickling's penchant for blue roses and red chrysanthemums made her feel almost unnecessarily cruel. Remonstrance, however, was useless, for Madame Mirabel did not even seem to hear what she said ; the things were bought and paid for, and there was an end of the matter.

Thus it fell out that on the eventful Friday afternoon, the afternoon that was to witness her introduction to "company" in her daughter's drawing-room, Mrs. Jickling presented a far more respectable appearance than she had ever done before. Robed in an old black velvet dress of Madame Mirabel's, with snowy muslin cuffs and some delicate frilling of the same material round her throat, Mrs. Jickling looked actually presentable ; indeed, she almost acknowledged as much as she surveyed herself in the pier-glass before going down. She was a woman who in her younger days had had more than the average share of good looks—a fact,

be it whispered, to which was due the undoubted *mésalliance* perpetrated by Madame Mirabel's papa; but the sordid trials and struggles incident to a life of penury had done much towards debasing her features, and their harsh outline was not mellowed by the cheap finery and coarse materials which her uncultivated taste no less than her unfortunately narrow means had hitherto prompted her to wear.

It was partly nervousness, and partly a confused sense of her own dignity, which induced Mrs. Jickling to defer her appearance in the drawing-room until after the ladies had arrived. Madame Mirabel was therefore sitting alone when Mrs. Fullerton, Mrs. Chattering, and Mrs. Burman were shown in; and she immediately detected, by their looks of expectation and curiosity, that they were dying to see her mother. The situation amused her greatly, though she was perfectly well aware that her teeth were to be set on edge a score of times that afternoon at the very least. Humiliation in its keenest form is seldom without a saving touch of the ludicrous.

"And so your mother's come to live with you, I hear," said Mrs. Fullerton, archly, as she settled herself comfortably upon the sofa. "Ah, now we know why poor Miss Tabor wasn't good enough for you. Oh, you sly creature! Isn't she a sly creature, Mrs. Chattering? *We've* heard all about it. Well, I must say I think you're very wise; it wasn't at all nice for you to be living alone, and your mother is the very best companion that you could possibly have."

"I assure you," replied Madame Mirabel, "that my mother's arrival was a complete surprise to me. She came to consult me on a matter of some importance to herself, and I do not think it at all likely that she will remain long."

Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering before Mrs. Fullerton could speak. "Well, we thought it was very strange you never told us anything about her; but of course if you didn't expect her yourself that's another thing. I've no doubt she'll be a great acquisition to the neighborhood as long as she remains, though she'll find it dull, I'm afraid, after London. There is always such a deal going on in London—concerts, and winter exhibitions, you know, and the Old Masters every now and then—so delightful it must be; while here, of course—well, one doesn't expect that sort of thing. Thank you, a piece of tea-cake, please—I'm always partial to tea-cake; I used to eat scarcely anything else when I was a girl at home."

"Except crumpets, I suppose," said Mrs. Fullerton, chuckling.

"I don't imagine Madame Mirabel's dear mother has been able to go about much to exhibitions," put in Mrs. Burman; "she is so very infirm, you know. How long is it since she last went out, did you tell me?"—turning to Madame Mirabel with an air of tender inquiry. "Quite an old lady, of course. The journey must have been a sad fatigue to her, I am afraid. I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing her to-day—or does she never leave her room?"

"I think she'll make an effort to come down on this occasion," answered Madame Mirabel, with a peculiar smile. "Ah, here's Mrs. Palliser. Come and sit here, Mrs. Palliser, near the fire; I know how you feel the cold. Will you have tea or coffee?"

"How cosey you all look!" said Mrs. Palliser, jauntily, as she responded to her hostess's greeting and took the seat reserved for her. "I'll have coffee, please. I oughtn't to drink tea, you know—it's so bad for my poor nerves. And how have you been, Mrs. Chattering, since we last met? I haven't seen you for an age."

"I'm never quite at my best in the winter," replied Mrs. Chattering, "but I've managed to steer pretty clear of colds hitherto, I'm glad to say. Poor Rosie hasn't been so fortunate; she's had a dreadful cough, and Dr. Lancaster doesn't seem to do her one bit of good."

"Dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, sympathetically.

"And are you all well at home?" asked Mrs. Fullerton.

"Yes, thank you, though we've not escaped colds and such like," said Mrs. Palliser. "Of course poor dear old Mrs. Palliser will never be any better; that is not to be expected. Still, she's pretty quiet, and doesn't suffer at all, so we've much to be thankful for in spite of everything. My husband's gone up to town to-day."

"And Gerard?" asked Madame Mirabel.

"Gerard is expecting to go to Sweden before long," replied Mrs. Palliser. "There's a most splendid opening for him there. Of course I don't want it talked about, and I shouldn't dream of mentioning the matter to anybody but just ourselves—quite in confidence, you know; but the last accounts we received were most promising, and we have great hopes that in a few weeks dear Gerard will—"

Mrs. Palliser stopped short, for at that moment a sound was heard in the passage which arrested everybody's attention. Then the door was slowly opened, and the face of Mrs. Jickling was seen peering into the room. The ladies all rose to their feet in expecta-

tion. A little rustle of astonishment was heard as the tall, gaunt, iron-gray, elderly woman advanced towards them with hesitating steps, and made a half-bewildered little bow to nobody in particular. Mrs. Burman fairly gasped as her eyes rested on the prototype of her dear, feeble, white-haired old lady, and for a moment she had no word to utter; Mrs. Fullerton looked patronizing, Mrs. Palliser smiling and gracious, while Mrs. Chattering put up her double eye-glass with an air of the frankest possible impertinence. Madame Mirabel, as usual, was quite equal to the occasion.

"Allow me to introduce my mother, Mrs. Jickling," she said, presenting her to each of the ladies in turn. "She has come to spend a week or two with me in the country. There's a chair for you, mother—next to Mrs. Chattering. Will you have tea or coffee?"

Mrs. Jickling, who had imagined that she would find the ladies seated round a well-spread tea-table arrayed in mittens and smart caps, was both astonished and dismayed at the informal nature of the entertainment. Her first impulse was to take Julia to task for not inviting them to remove their bonnets; but her courage failed, and she sank submissively into the seat assigned to her, sipping her coffee with a half-frightened air which contrasted very curiously with the amused nonchalance of Madame Mirabel.

"You live in London, I believe, Mrs. Jickling," remarked Mrs. Fullerton in her deep voice. "Well, it's the centre of everything—quite the capital of the world, in fact. It's quite a pleasure to see somebody from town. We're so very quiet here, you know. I suppose London's beginning to fill up now, isn't it?"

"The streets are mostly pretty full, I think," replied Mrs. Jickling, warily. "But I live retired; I can't say I see much of what's goin' on. Most of my gadding was done when I was a young woman, like Julia here. Have you lived in the country long, ma'am?"

"Yes, for many years," said Mrs. Fullerton.

"Must 'ave been very dull for you, I should think," remarked Mrs. Jickling. "Give me London; only in London of course one requires a good income, and a good income is just what some people haven't got."

"Very few people are satisfied with their incomes," replied Mrs. Fullerton; "it all depends on what you call a good income. I always say that everybody's rich who only spends eighty per cent. of his means; that's what I do, and I don't know why more people

don't follow my example. There'd be far less pauperism in the world if they did."

"A most excellent theory for those who have a thousand a year," put in Madame Mirabel.

"Ah! if we could get five-penny loaves for fourpence farthing we'd all be well-to-do," said Mrs. Jickling. "It's a bad thing to be poor. It brings one down among the common people, and shuts one out from everything worth havin'. Not as *I* complain. I saw plenty o' life when I was first married—parties and theatres every night, mostly, and comp'ny, oh, any amount; never was such gayety as we used to 'ave. Now, of course, I've done with all that. I'm gettin' on in years, and prefer to live quiet, as Julia there will tell you."

"Ah! Quite so," said Mrs. Chattering. "And I believe you live in a nice quiet neighborhood—near one of the parks, I think I've heard. Well, that's almost as good as the country. I used to live close by Kensington Gardens myself, and the grass and trees and water were really charming—and then all the people one used to see, so cheerful, you know, particularly on Sundays after church, and in the afternoon—quite the prettiest park in Europe, I always think."

"Oh, aye; I shouldn't wonder," answered Mrs. Jickling.

"It's perfectly sweet!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, enthusiastically. "I love Kensington Gardens—and the Ring, you know, and the Row, and the Ladies' Mile. The dear princess drives there constantly, and I always envied the men taking off their hats to her—I longed to do something of the same sort, only of course there's nothing we *can* do, is there? Oh, I'd go and live in London tomorrow if I could live near one of the parks. It is such a pity that our dear Queen is there so seldom."

"I suppose you often see the princess driving in the park, Mrs.—a—Jingles—I beg your pardon; I have such a wretched ear for names—I should say Mrs. Jickling," said Mrs. Chattering.

"Not very lately, ma'am," confessed Mrs. Jickling. "My 'ouse is in Royalty Park—Augusta Victoria Villas, Royalty Park, in the south o' London, and for all its name royalties don't patronize our neighborhood over and above. No, I live very quiet, just keep myself *to* myself, and only know as many people as I wish to. I always think one's own circle of acquaintance should be kep' select, and in a place like London one never need know anybody one doesn't want to."

"For my part," observed Mrs. Burman in her cooing way, "I prefer travelling. I dare say you don't go abroad very much; of course it has its hardships, especially if one isn't a very good sailor, but still I love the change to foreign countries. You've been a great traveller in your time, Madame Mirabel, I believe?"

"Well, I was in the East for some years," replied Madame Mirabel. "But I confess I like Europe better. It was delightful at the Riviera when I was there lately—I mean the perpetual sunshine, of course, and the fine scenery. It is always a great relief to get out of England for the winter."

"Indeed it is," chimed in Mrs. Palliser, patting her full gray curls complacently. "I've never been to the Riviera; that's a pleasure to come. But I love Paris—so gay and bright, you know, and the beautiful Bois to drive in, and the Champs Elysées—oh, it's all lovely, I think. Switzerland, too. Do you know Interlachen, Mrs. Jickling? It is the very sweetest place. You weren't at the Riviera with Madame Mirabel, I think?"

"I was not, ma'am," replied Mrs. Jickling; "in fact I'd only just come back from abroad myself when she went."

Madame Mirabel, with a carelessness very unusual in her, here happened to knock over a tea-cup, making a clatter which for the moment called off the attention of the ladies from the conversation.

"Oh indeed," resumed Mrs. Palliser with friendly interest. "That must have been a nice change for you after London. Where did you go to, may I ask?"

"I stayed mostly at a place called Gursaw," answered Mrs. Jickling. "You may 'ave been there, if you know Switzerland—on the lake, you know, about an hour from Lucerne. Plenty of first-rate visitors there were, too, and everything done in style—late dinner every day, and dancin' afterwards for them as liked it. I can't say I thought much o' the wines, though—poor thin stuff they were, as wouldn't intoxicate a fly; while as for their breakfasts, well, it's a mercy I never was much of a hand at breakfast, for I was nearly starved as it was, bein' accustomed all my life to my egg and rasher of a mornin', a thing you couldn't get in Switzerland for love or money—nothing but a lot of flimsy crusts and some stuff they said was honey, but which I believe was nothing more than pear-juice and glycerine. Otherwise, ma'am, and on the whole, I certainly approved of Switzerland," concluded Mrs. Jickling, "and though some persons did try and put upon me and take

advantage of me through being a foreigner, they all belonged to the lower orders, and I'm bound to confess that the people of the house I stayed at were as honest in their charges as could be expected."

"The pithiest *impressions de voyage* I ever remember to have heard," exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, with scarcely veiled contempt. "You have summed up the entire subject, Mrs. Jickling, in the fewest possible words. Certainly travelling has this advantage—that it opens people's minds and enlarges their views of life; we stay-at-homes are apt to get very rusty and stupid. I always feel at a disadvantage in the presence of anybody who has seen the world. It's quite an education in itself."

"It's not of much use, though, without the culture which comes from books," remarked Madame Mirabel, who had her own reasons for wishing to divert attention from Mrs. Jickling's Continental experiences.

"A very just remark," said Mrs. Fullerton approvingly. "I think I've heard that said before; or perhaps I've read it somewhere. There's nothing like books, when they're judiciously selected. Your daughter is a great reader, Mrs. Jickling, as I dare say you know. It's really wonderful, when one thinks what a power books are in the world, both for good and evil. I always make it a rule myself to read only high-class literature—books which deal with the highest subjects and treat them in the most unexceptionable way. I dare say, now, that you have been a great reader in your time, Mrs. Jickling, and I'm sure that you'll agree with me."

"Yes, indeed, I'm quite of your way of thinking," replied Mrs. Jickling. "I can't abide low books—all about the lower orders, you know, like Dickens's, for instance. Give me books with some style in 'em—as makes you think the author must 'a moved in good society, and knows the world, and understands what he's writin' about. But low life—oh, lor! It's disagreeable enough in reality, and I can't see what pleasure there can be in readin' about it, for my part. I always think the less one knows about such things the better."

"Oh, dear! I don't think I meant that exactly," exclaimed Mrs. Fullerton. "Some of the best books we have are about the poor. You evidently prefer stories of fashionable life?"

"Well, I must say I do," said Mrs. Jickling with decision.

"To be sure," remarked Mrs. Chattering sweetly. "It's only

natural that we should derive the greatest enjoyment from a description of the scenes and people we are most familiar with."

Madame Mirabel's eyes emitted a scornful flash. It was at least some consolation to see that her mother was not the only person present who lacked refinement. "Let me give you another cup of tea, Mrs. Chattering," she said, by way of evincing her gratitude.

"Well," said Mrs. Palliser cheerfully, "what I enjoy most is a really good *religious* novel. Who was it who said that the brightest examples of Christian character were to be found in fiction? I can't remember at the moment — I have such a treacherous memory. However, I know it struck me at the time as being a most impressive observation."

"And who is your favorite religious novelist?" asked Mrs. Fullerton.

"Well, George Eliot is one," replied Mrs. Palliser; "I look upon *Adam Bede* as quite a religious book, you know — Dinah Morris the Methodist is alone sufficient to stamp it with that character. I only wish all our novelists were so sweetly pious. Oh, and then there are the Howitts, and dear Mrs. Stowe, and Dr. Farrar — all beautiful writers in their way — and Catherine Sinclair, who wrote that lovely *Father Clement*."

"Very true, very true indeed," murmured Mrs. Burman. "Don't you admire George Eliot, Mrs. Jickling?"

"H'm — I can't say I'm fond of Methodistical writers myself," answered that lady with a sniff. "Sermons are all very well in church, I dare say, but I don't care for 'em in books, especially when they try to make out as decent people are on a level with publicans and thieves. I s'pose we're all sinners in a way, but Methodism is a thing as I can't abide — there's something low about it, as is only fit for common people. I prefer my religion in a genteeler form."

The ladies looked somewhat dubious at this, and one or two of them were inclined to smile. Madame Mirabel, having made up her mind to the worst, actually took a sort of sardonic pleasure in the repeated shocks from which her friends were suffering. What did it matter, after all? That her mother was a common, vulgar-minded old person was unfortunately a fact not to be disputed; and if it were ordained that she should suddenly appear among them all and make an exhibition of herself, well, she could not help it, and there was nothing more to be said. What did Madame Mirabel care for the opinion of her neighbors? They were nothing to her, except in so far as their countenance and intercourse

might help on the attainment of the only object she now had in life—the prize for which she had staked everything. At the same time the reference to Mrs. Jickling's tour to Switzerland gave her an unpleasant twinge, and afforded an additional illustration of the imperative necessity of providing for her elsewhere at the earliest possible opportunity.

Mrs. Fullerton, who in spite of her foibles had the instincts of a lady—which was scarcely true in the fullest sense of Mrs. Chattering—now turned the conversation into a more general channel, in order to shield Mrs. Jickling from the risk of committing herself still further. She saw clearly enough that Mrs. Jickling was (as she expressed it) impossible; and felt that Madame Mirabel was rather to be pitied than blamed for being handicapped with so very undesirable a parent. Furthermore she was inclined to admire her for the brave face she put upon the matter, and decided that as long as Mrs. Jickling remained in Hindhead she would give her such countenance as would support Madame Mirabel under the burden that had been laid upon her. Mrs. Palliser, always kindly and courteous, saw at a glance how matters stood, and came virtually to the same conclusion; but Mrs. Chattering was perceived, by that subtle freemasonry which exists among women, to be distinctly contemptuous and hostile, while Mrs. Burman could not bring herself to forgive Madame Mirabel for having allowed her to be so grossly misled as to the color of Mrs. Jickling's hair.

Nothing could have been more effusive than the way in which all the visitors eventually took leave. Mrs. Chattering was especially gushing, and vowed that Madame Mirabel's tea-cakes transcended any she had ever tasted before; or if it wasn't that, it was the delightful conversation she had enjoyed, and the pleasure of making so inestimable a new acquaintance. There was something very womanly about Mrs. Chattering. Good Mrs. Palliser walked part of the way home with her, and the two ladies enjoyed themselves amazingly in comparing notes. What pleasure, after all, is comparable to that derived from "talking over" other people! When we apply to the process the popular expression "picking them to pieces," there is conveyed to the mind a suggestion of opprobrium and uncharity; but if we use the more scientific term "analysis," which after all means very much the same, all condemnation on the score of malice is rendered antecedently impossible. Madame Mirabel meanwhile taxed her brains to discover some way out of the difficulty in which she found herself, and Mrs. Jickling sank into a complacent reverie.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LIGHT GOES OUT

It need scarcely be said that Gerard did not share the elation of his parents at his glowing prospects. Caring very little, naturally, for mercantile interests and pursuits, he was yet shrewd enough to have very serious doubts of the substantiality of the Swedish project; he knew the promoter of the company to be a scamp, and suspected that the Directorate was made up of fools and knaves; and his principal concern was for the disappointment which he felt sure awaited his confiding father and mother. In addition to this, what chiefly occupied his mind was the uncertainty oppressing him with respect to his infatuation for Madame Mirabel. The recency of her widowhood had of course deterred him from speaking to her on the subject hitherto; he longed to know his fate, and yet was afraid to tempt it; rejection would crush him to the earth, while acceptance—his heart leaped at the very thought—would almost certainly involve the greatest pain to one, at any rate, of his parents. It was true that Madame Mirabel had been a welcome guest in their house, and that Mrs. Palliser was now on very cordial terms with her; but he felt instinctively that she would recoil in dismay from the idea of receiving such a person as a daughter-in-law, even apart from her known advocacy of Rosie Chattering. *That*, of course, was a thing that could never be. Had there been no other woman in the world, nothing, he vowed, would ever induce him to enter into an engagement with so entirely uninteresting, unsympathetic, and empty-headed a creature as his mother's favorite. Meanwhile, however, he was not in a position to marry anybody; unless, of course, this wonderful company should really turn out successful, in which case—and then his heart-searchings would begin all over afresh, and he felt more undecided what to do than ever.

The aimlessness of his life, too, weighed upon him very heavily. It is true that here the fault lay with Mr. Palliser, whose harum-scarum, unpractical turn of mind led him to reject many excellent

openings for Gerard because they were not sufficiently brilliant, and to be ever on the lookout for some sensational and splendid opportunity to arise by which his clever son might achieve fame in six months and fortune in a year at most. Gerard saw the visionariness of these foolish schemes, but was powerless to take any step himself. There was a certain indolence about him, too, and an undefined longing to "do something"—something great and practical—something that should prove of value to mankind at large—which prevented him from doing anything at all; and this led him to cherish much morbid discontent, and to talk a vast deal of cheap pessimism between the puffs of his meerschaum pipe, in a way that irritated his good mother considerably.

"You're an ungrateful, impious, naughty boy, to speak like that," she said to him on one occasion. "One would think you didn't believe in an overruling Providence at all; indeed I'm very much afraid you don't, my dear, and *I* think it's a most shocking thing. Here's your fortune as good as made—or will be, when you get this appointment in Sweden; and then you'll be in a position to marry as soon as ever you like. There are thousands of young men who would give their ears to be in the same position; and yet there you sit moralizing and grumbling and disparaging everything till I don't know how to bear with you. I declare you make me lose all patience with you sometimes."

"When I get the appointment in Sweden, mother—and begin to make all those thousands a year—my views of life may possibly undergo a change," remarked Gerard, slowly.

"Well, I hope they will, my dear," retorted Mrs. Palliser. "Nothing like an active, successful life for inspiring cheerfulness and faith. And I do hope, Gerard, that when once you *are* settled, you'll think seriously of marrying. I believe in early marriages, you know, and always have. It keeps young men straight to marry early, and gives them something to think about and work for."

"I've no objection, mother—supposing the right sort of person is available," replied Gerard, carelessly.

"The right sort of person *is* available, my dear," said Mrs. Palliser with energy. "It has not pleased God to give me a daughter, and that has been the great sorrow of my life. But you—well, Gerard, you can supply the deficiency. When you bring me some dear, sweet, unsophisticated girl, brought up under nice Christian influences in a refined home, it will be the happiest day I shall

have had since you were born to me. Now I'm not a match-maker, my dear, and never was. I believe in young people being left to arrange their own affairs with each other; but you know perfectly well, Gerard, how fond I am of dear Rosie Chattering, and how ardently I have hoped that you might like her too. What can you want more? She's pretty, she's amiable, she's refined, she has excellent principles, and I believe she's already rather fond of *you*, my dear. Of course, I say nothing; I wouldn't interfere, I wouldn't even suggest such a thing to you, for a moment; but—but"—and here the good lady stopped short with a look of wistful appeal that had a very sensible effect on Gerard.

"I wish you could see, mother, how utterly unsuited we are to one another, he observed, mildly."

"Well, I must say I *don't* see it, my dear," replied Mrs. Palliser. "What is there unsuitable between you, I should like to know?"

"In the first place," said Gerard, "I'm not in love with her. That of itself is enough, I should think. Secondly, I must honestly tell you, mother, that I do not share your admiration for her in the smallest degree; in fact I rather dislike her. And thirdly, we haven't a single interest or idea in common, nor is there as far as I know any one point of sympathy between us. Under these circumstances I think it not unlikely that our marriage might turn out a failure."

"I never heard of such a thing since I was born!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser with her most astounded air. "You must be very hard to please, it seems to me. However, if that is the case, I'll say no more; though it's a disappointment to me, Gerard, a very grievous disappointment, I assure you. I only hope you haven't gone and got entangled with anybody else, that's all. There's nobody I can think of in *this* neighborhood, anyhow; what you may have been about elsewhere, of course I can't possibly tell."

Gerard did not enlighten his mother any further, and after a few moments a diversion occurred in the entrance of old Mrs. Palliser in her wheeled chair, accompanied by Nurse Osborne. The old lady had been failing visibly during the past few weeks; but all the painful features of her alienation had disappeared, and, as she seemed rather to enjoy an occasional change from her own room, the doctor had given permission for her to spend an hour or two down-stairs every afternoon.

"Ah, here she is!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, cheerfully, as she rose from her seat and went forward to move a chair or two out

of the way. "Not too near the fire, nurse—the room's very warm, and I think she likes being by the window better; it amuses her to look out and watch the birds. It's such a fine, bright afternoon, too. Gerard, dear, just help me to move this table, will you? The least bit will do—that's it. And how has she been all the morning, nurse?"

"Much as usual," said the nurse, with a pleasant smile. "She doesn't seem to take much notice, but she's been comfortable enough, I think."

The old lady was soon comfortably settled near the window, which commanded a cheerful view of the garden, now looking almost gay in the pale yellow light of an April sun. She had not been there ten minutes before Dr. Lancaster arrived. He usually came in two or three times a week to see how she was getting on, and although, of course, there was not the slightest chance of her recovery, his visits did her good. She was not only flattered by the attentions of her dear "Sir Anthony," but cheered by the doctor's genial presence and sympathetic manners; so true is it that a cheerful countenance doeth good like a medicine—and even more good, in many cases, though what would become of apothecaries if the aphorism were carried into general practice is of course another question. But of one thing we may be sure—that no man of solemn or lugubrious countenance ought ever to be a doctor.

"Well," said Lancaster, as he went forward and took a seat by the side of the old lady, "watching the birds, eh? We shall have to get you out into the garden itself when the warm weather comes. Rather too cold just now, you know. You're fond of looking out of doors, aren't you?"

The old lady nodded with a contented air, but made no reply.

"She has a wonderful fancy for looking out of the window," remarked Nurse Osborne. "Her brain always seems clearer then, and she don't get those fantastic notions in her head that she does when the blinds are down."

"Ah, I dare say not," answered Lancaster, observing the old lady's face. "It's more cheerful out of doors than in, isn't it?" he said, trying to rouse her attention.

"Aye," she murmured, slowly, and in a very feeble voice. "There's the sun, and the birds, and they come and tell me all about heaven, where they live. They'll take me back with them some day, you know, my dear."

She nodded again, and then, apparently forgetting the doctor's presence, turned her head away and closed her eyes. Lancaster, willing to let her doze if she felt so inclined, rose from his seat and joined Mrs. Palliser and Gerard by the fire.

Mrs. Palliser now rang for tea, and Dr. Lancaster, who confessed himself as bad as any old woman where the social cup was concerned, declared his intention of spending at least an hour with them and enjoying a rest and chat. He was very often tired, he said, but never too tired to talk, especially when his nerves were refreshed and braced with tea; and just then his presence was particularly welcome, as poor Mrs. Palliser was feeling all the freshness of her disappointment with respect to her cherished project, and Gerard, too, was somewhat out of tune. He respected Lancaster, and felt that the doctor understood him; while between his parents and himself there was scarcely any mental touch at all.

The conversation turned upon the topics of the day—politics, social questions, current literature, and so forth. Influenza was then just beginning to attract attention, and Mrs. Palliser seemed very eager to hear all about it; from which to leprosy was of course a natural and easy step, and Lancaster was eventually deep in a description of the Leper Settlement in Saghalien, a series of most interesting articles on which had lately appeared in the *Stethoscope*. The idea of leprosy as an actually existing disorder seemed somewhat new to Mrs. Palliser, who now realized for the first time that the disease was not confined to people in the Bible; and she was much interested as Lancaster proceeded to describe the plans that were being made for the relief of the sufferers and the promotion of their social and moral welfare. The hospitals, the medical and missionary staffs, the regimen, and the attempted alleviation of pain—all these were already organized, and the best results had so far attended them; but what excited her wonder and admiration most of all was Lancaster's account of the Secular Mission which it was hoped would shortly be sent out to Saghalien, consisting of a certain number of devoted men and women distinct from the doctors and nurses, whose sole duty it would be to infuse that brightness into the lives of the unfortunate sufferers which comes from social and intellectual activity. No longer would the leper be doomed to the dreadful isolation imposed upon him by the despairing cry "Unclean, unclean;" no longer condemned to pass an animal existence of pain and hopelessness and

barbarism and unaided ignorance. There were men, now, ready and willing to take their lives in their hands, and, actuated by the sublimest spirit of self-sacrifice, to devote themselves to the great work of making lepers happy. In addition to spiritual and medical assistance the lepers of Saghalien were to enjoy those rays of sunshine which come from music, from pictures, from interesting and wholesome books, from poetry, even from the fairy-tales of science itself. Their *minds* were to be cared for, as well as their souls and bodies. Their lives were to be brightened, and made "worth living." The "youth sublime" was no longer to be the exclusive prerogative of the healthy and the prosperous. In a word, the most desolate and forsaken class of God's creatures were to be rescued from the limbo where they had been left so long to rot, and given such share as they could accept of the inheritance which is the birthright of us all.

Gerard said very little while Lancaster was explaining the details of this plan; indeed, all pauses were sufficiently filled by the exclamations of wonder and approbation with which Mrs. Palliser punctuated his discourse. But he was not, for that reason, the less interested. On the contrary, the scheme impressed him very powerfully. It was the one thing he had ever heard that had really laid hold of him, and was calculated to fire his imagination. He now felt—and this was the initial stage of the process he was undergoing—what it was that had constituted one of the greatest needs that had been unconsciously oppressing him. He had wanted something he could admire. To a missionary he could not accord full admiration, first because he did not believe in the missionary's theology, and, secondly, because the missionary, as he said, enjoyed a good salary and all sorts of creature comforts; in fact, he made his living as most other people did, and got well paid for, it too. But this was a different sort of thing altogether. Here was something he could not only admire, but reverence. And as he thought of the promised thousands a year he was to reap from the sale of non-intoxicating liquors, according to his parents' account, and contrasted such a life with the ideal now presented to his mind, his revulsion from the Swedish scheme grew into a sense of loathing. What was he to do? He had wanted counsel; well, here was a counsel of perfection. Would he have strength to follow it?

Mr. Palliser came in soon afterwards, and the conversation flowed into different channels. There was a breeziness and a

cheeriness about the good gentleman's presence that affected most people very pleasantly, and he was always glad to meet the doctor. He sat down on a low chair opposite the fire, and sipped his tea as though he thoroughly enjoyed it.

"Well, what's the news to-day?" said Lancaster, as he spread his hands out to the blaze.

"There's another revolution in Bolivia," replied Mr. Palliser, "according to the placards. I don't know what we're coming to, I'm sure. It seems to me, Lancaster, that the entire world is on the eve of some tremendous crisis."

"Oh, those revolutions in South American don't amount to much," said Lancaster, smiling. "A revolution there is simply what we call a change of Cabinet, only it's generally accompanied by a street procession or two in which a few people get a crack on the head by accident. It's their way of doing it, that's all."

"Ah," said Mr. Palliser, looking mighty portentous. "That's all very well, but it plays the deuce with the share-market. I want another cup of tea, my dear—and I must beg you not to stint me of sugar this time, if you please. You never will give me anything I like, you perverse woman."

"My dear Marmaduke, I gave you two great lumps," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, who never enjoyed herself more than when her husband pretended to scold her. "Dr. Lancaster, let me give you another cup, too. Here are some nice hot tea-cakes, Marmaduke—have some, my dear."

"In order to take away all my appetite for dinner, I suppose," grumbled her husband, helping himself pretty liberally. "I know your tricks and your manners. Well, we'll hope this Bolivian business isn't serious—it may throw us all back again if it is. They say the army has revolted this time."

"How quiet your mother is!" remarked Mrs. Palliser after a short pause.

"How has the old dear been, to-day?" asked her husband, munching his cakes.

"Oh, very well—just as usual," replied Mrs. Palliser. "She ought to wake up, now, and have her tea."

Nurse Osborne looked up inquiringly, and Mrs. Palliser, rising, moved towards the old lady's chair near the window. Dr. Lancaster made some trivial observation to his host, preparatory to taking his departure, and began searching for his gloves. The sun was just setting.

"Dr. Lancaster! Marmaduke!" cried Mrs. Palliser, suddenly.

Both turned in surprise. She was standing by the window at the farther end of the room, bending over the old lady's chair. Lancaster hastily got up and joined her, while Mr. Palliser was struggling to his feet. For a minute there was dead silence.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Palliser.

"Oh, Marmaduke, the dear old lady's gone!" cried his wife, bursting into tears.

"Gone?" echoed her husband. "What—do you mean she's—"

He stood transfixed in the middle of the room, and for a few moments was unable to utter a word more. Mrs. Palliser sank into a chair trembling violently, and buried her face in her hands.

"My dear sir," interposed Lancaster, gently, "I fear it is too true." He had been examining the old lady's eyes, and listening for her heart. "She has passed away—quite peacefully—in her sleep."

Mr. Palliser's mouth quivered a little, but he controlled himself. His wife wept openly, and Gerard was deeply moved. Yes, the old lady would never watch the birds again. There she lay in her chair, pale and still, an expression of entire content and peace upon her ivory features, calm in the majesty of death.

It was in deference to the personal wish of the old lady, now deceased, that her husband had left the bulk of his fortune to his son Marmaduke, she herself declining to accept more than the very moderate competence of five hundred pounds a year. That, she said, was an ample provision for a woman of simple tastes with only herself to keep; while Marmaduke, then a young and active man, newly engaged to a lady who would bring him nothing, might reasonably look forward to having an expensive family. After her husband's death, his widow resided for some time upon the Continent; then she returned to England, and took a house in the neighborhood of Dulwich; and it was not until seven years before the opening of this story, that, beginning to feel the infirmities of age, and wishing to try a drier and more bracing atmosphere, she had accepted the urgent invitation of the Pallisers to make her home with them. It was well she did so, for, a considerable portion of her competence being invested in East and West India Dock shares, she soon found herself deprived of two hundred pounds of annual income; and the loss would have been a rather serious one had she continued alone. Under her son's

roof, however, the three hundred a year which still remained to her was naturally a great deal more than she could spend, and she was consequently able, not only to exercise considerable generosity, but also to save money. Thus, when she died, her accumulations amounted to nearly a thousand pounds; and this sum, together with the income of which she stood possessed, she bequeathed to her grandson Gerard.

CHAPTER XXII

A DISCLOSURE AND A WARNING

"MOTHER," said Madame Mirabel, a day or two after the events described in the last chapter, "I think it is time we came to some decision about your future plans."

"Which means, I suppose, that you've already decided," replied Mrs. Jickling, with a sharp glance.

"You shall first tell me what you think of my suggestions," said her daughter, calmly. "It seems to me that even if you had not lost your annuity it would have been undesirable for you to continue house-keeping, which involves unnecessary trouble, loneliness, and expense. My idea is that you should first go up to town, and sell off whatever furniture you may have; and then, when you come back, we will look out for some nice boarding-house. That will be far more cheerful for you than living all alone, and no doubt we shall be able to make good terms on the understanding that you stay permanently. Of course I shall add something to what you have still left, and the sale of your effects in Royalty Park will place you in funds to start with."

"H'm!" muttered Mrs. Jickling, thoughtfully. "And whereabouts, now, do you think of looking for this boarding-house?"

"Well, if you prefer London, I should think it would be easy enough to find one in some suitable neighborhood," replied Madame Mirabel; "Hackney, for instance, or somewhere near Victoria Park, or, if you preferred a more central situation, there's Burton Crescent. Any one would be an improvement on Stockwell. If I were you, I think I should prefer a country town, or some quiet sea-side place. Or you might even live abroad, if you cared to. There are plenty of nice cheerful places in Germany, now, where you could make your money go a long way — places, you know, where there are nice promenades and bands and public gardens. My own impression is that that would suit you best of all."

"I'm not so sure o' that," replied Mrs. Jickling, warily. The fact

was that the suggestions made by Madame Mirabel were not altogether unwelcome to her, for in spite of the rank and fashion into which she had been introduced she was beginning to feel somewhat at a disadvantage in her daughter's house. Julia was "that masterful," as she expressed it; and Mrs. Jickling, who loved position and authority, found more pleasure in patronizing than in being patronized. Besides, one certainly could live very cheaply in Germany, and present quite a figure on a hundred pounds a year. But of course it would not do to give too ready an assent.

"I'm not so sure o' that," she repeated, assuming a dissatisfied air. "Folks eats their victuals raw in Germany, so I've 'eard tell, and I couldn't stomach that, Julia, nohow. You wouldn't like it yourself, you know, but of course it's good enough for your mother," she added with an aggrieved sniff.

"Stuff and nonsense," said Madame Mirabel somewhat brusquely. "The food in Germany is particularly good and plentiful—better, a great deal, than what you have had to put up with hitherto in London. Tell me, now—how much money have you left? What can you reckon upon, safely, every year?"

"Well," said Mrs. Jickling, "what with my bit of pension, and one or two other trifles—a share or two here and there—I should say it was a matter of about fifty pound."

"Fifty pounds a year," repeated Madame Mirabel. "Very good. Now in Germany you can live for four marks a day, and live well, too. That comes to, say, seventy-five pounds a year in round numbers. Now I propose to make up the difference, and add something over for extras. Of course you'll require pocket-money, you know, for caps and gloves and such things. That is the best I can do for you, and I recommend you to think it over carefully."

"Well, we'll talk about it when I get back from London," said Mrs. Jickling, who had privately made up her mind to accept the offer. "It's a serious thing, though, a woman leaving her own country at my time o' life. One 'ud think I was an Irish emigrant. However, we'll say no more about it now. When do the trains run up to town?"

Madame Mirabel, who saw that she had virtually carried her point, fetched a time-table, and gave her mother full particulars of the service. Of course the sale of the furniture would keep Mrs. Jickling in London for four or five days at least, and this time Madame Mirabel intended to turn to the fullest possible advantage. In the first place, she hoped to institute such inquiries with regard

to *pensions* in Germany — for it would be an excellent thing if she could once get her mother settled definitely somewhere out of England — as would enable her to propose some particular establishment in some particular town to Mrs. Jickling as soon as she returned ; in the second place, the spell of freedom to which she was looking forward would indeed be thrown away if she suffered it to pass without another interview with the man she loved. It can scarcely be said that Madame Mirabel's ideas of right and wrong were confused. The strange thing about her was that she denied, or ignored, the existence of either as such. She recognized no law, no standard, no ideal. Duty, in her eyes, was simply that course of action which was prompted by a combination of natural bias and expediency ; by Truth, she understood only the resultant of a process in logic or mathematics ; God, to her, was nothing more than the reification of a concept. And yet she felt that, under different circumstances, she might be able to regard herself with greater complacency than she did under prevailing conditions. Just as Mrs. Rawdon Crawley thought how easy it must be to be good with five thousand a year, so did Madame Mirabel think it possible that her own conduct or character might assimilate itself more to popular criteria of goodness could the one great longing of her life be gratified. Her love for Lancaster was pure and deep and strong. He was the one man she had ever met whom she could reverence and look up to. Hers was no vulgar passion. She would have scorned to be the object of a vulgar passion herself, and she was incapable of cherishing it towards another. But her love was none the less intense, none the less importunate, none the less tyrannical, because so austere and pure. And she knew that her very life depended upon the success of her great endeavor.

She was looking calm enough, two days afterwards, when Lancaster, in obedience to her summons, joined her in the drawing-room. Who could have suspected the tempest that was raging in her breast ? Not he, for one. She gave him her hand with a bright, brief smile of welcome, and motioned him to a seat.

"You're looking far from well," he said, regarding her with some concern. "I shall have to prescribe for you, I'm afraid. Are you suffering in any way?"

"If anybody else had asked me that, I should have entered an unqualified plea of not guilty," she replied in a low voice ; "but to you I don't mind admitting that my nerves are out of order, and that I sleep badly." —

"I'm sorry," said Lancaster, "to hear that. We must see what a course of bromides will do for you. It often happens that the effects of a great shock are not felt immediately, and people who bear up so wonderfully while troubles last are brought to book afterwards. Your mother is staying with you, I believe?"

"I wanted to speak to you about my mother," replied Madame Mirabel. "It is as well that I should tell you frankly that—well, that in her younger days she had not many educational advantages. In fact, my father was rather cut by his family when he married her. However, they got on together well enough, and she was always a good mother to me. He was killed in one of our little wars in Afghanistan, you know. Well, my mother has just lost the principal part of her income, and now the question is what is to be done with her. I'm afraid she had set her heart upon coming to live with me. That is out of the question. It would be good for neither of us. My own proposal is that a home should be found for her in some nice cheerful place in Germany, and I broached it to her the other day—not without some prospect of success. You see, living there is both good and cheap, and I could always run over and see her when I felt inclined."

"Quite so, quite so," assented Lancaster, nodding slightly. "The idea seems to me excellent in every way."

"Of course I knew that you must have heard about my mother's arrival," continued Madame Mirabel, "and I therefore wanted to tell you exactly the position of affairs. The greatest nonsense, I believe, has been talked outside, and I dare say that some of it may have reached you."

"Your mother is still with you, I believe?" asked Lancaster.

"She is in town just now," replied Madame Mirabel; "she went up the other day to see about selling off her furniture and so on, and I don't expect her back before the end of the week. There'll be time enough then to settle her future plans. And now tell me about yourself. How are you, and what have you been about?"

"Working, to be sure," he answered, with a laugh. "Trying, on one hand, to convince a few healthy persons that they really have nothing the matter with them, and, on the other, to persuade some who are actually ill that if they don't attend to directions they'll place themselves beyond my power altogether. Every doctor, I suppose, has those two classes among his patients. I'm beginning to believe that the only way to treat some people is to work upon their imaginations."

"That ought not to be difficult," remarked Madame Mirabel. "Most people in the world can be made to believe anything."

"Cynic!" laughed Lancaster. "My study of human nature has resulted in gentler thoughts. But candidly, are we not all of us more or less under the influence of imagination? It is a great power in life, believe me. Much that passes with us for reality is imagination and nothing more, and affects us in exact proportion to our capacity for distinguishing its true character."

She shot a glance at him, as though he had unwittingly touched a chord.

"You'll find it is so, if you think it over," he said, with confidence. "There are few more interesting subjects of study than illusions, whether sensational, psychological, mnemonic, or what you will. There are illusions of insight as well as of eyesight—"

"Ah!" cried Madame Mirabel, faintly. "Yes, I believe that—I believe that. And they all have a physical basis—they are all individual and subjective. It is when the subject of them believes in their objectivity that insanity begins. It is always well to remember that."

Lancaster looked at her a little curiously. "You are the unlike-liest person I ever knew to be the subject of illusions," he remarked, with a pleasant smile. "You're too level-headed for that sort of trouble, I should say. But apropos of illusions, you've heard, no doubt, that poor old Mrs. Palliser is gone?"

"Old Mrs. Palliser?" exclaimed Madame Mirabel. "No, indeed I had not heard it. It must have been very sudden, wasn't it?"

"It was sudden," he replied. "I was there at the time; we were all chatting together by the fire over our tea, when Mrs. Palliser discovered almost accidentally, so to speak, that the old lady was dead. She died in her sleep, in fact, quite quietly and without pain."

"How strange I should not have known!" said Madame Mirabel. "Then she never recovered her mind, I suppose? There was no lucid interval before death?"

"No, I fancy not," said Lancaster. "I never had any hope of her recovery, and no one could have had a more perfectly easy death; but of course the suddenness of it was a great shock to the Pallisers. She's to be buried the day after to-morrow, I believe."

"Well, let us have some tea," suggested Madame Mirabel, rousing herself after a thoughtful pause. Lancaster immediately got up and touched the bell; then, instead of resuming his seat, he saun-

tered to the bookcase and began to con over the titles of the books. "What an omnivorous reader you are!" he exclaimed, as he took down one volume after another and glanced rapidly across its pages. "Vogt, Büchner, Schopenhauer, Hartmann—oh, shocking! why do you read such morbid stuff as this? *The Philosophy of the Unconscious*, indeed—*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*—*Die Nichtigkeit des Lebens*—oh, this will never do! Schopenhauer was a diseased man, and everything he wrote bore the taint of its author's distemper. Talk of illusions, forsooth!—Bain—Maudsley—Andrew Wilson—G. H. Lewes—Spencer, *of course*—Darwin—A. R. Wallace—come now, that's better—Haeckel—h'm—McCosh's *Intuitions*—yes, that's good—and—let me see—one, two, three, four, *five* books on hypnotism! Well, that is an unexpected wind-up. How long have you taken to studying hypnotism, pray, Madame Mirabel?"

She had been lying back in her chair, watching him with infinite amusement as he pulled her books about and criticised her taste. The familiarity of the proceeding delighted her, and suggested a pleasurable and welcome train of thought to which she abandoned herself without restraint. Lancaster's last remark, however, seemed to jar her nerves. A shadow passed over her face, and for a moment she looked embarrassed and annoyed.

"Oh, I take an interest in most things, you know," she replied, with assumed carelessness. "The phenomena ascribed to hypnotism open up a very curious field of speculation, and I have often wanted to find out what place they are destined to occupy in pathological science. Any new manifestation of natural force, I think, is worth studying."

Lancaster raised his eyebrows with a puzzled look. "Well, I hope you won't pursue your researches into the sphere of practice or experiment," he said, as he replaced the book he had been glancing at upon the shelf. "Hypnotism is like a powerful drug—potent for good, but in some applications a very deadly poison. What's this? Oh, I see—our friend Comte. I'll tell you what, Madame Mirabel, your library wants leavening a bit."

"I knew you'd think that," she answered, smiling.

"You should read Flint," continued Lancaster. "I'll send you round something of his in a day or two. You should read Flint, and Hegel, and Lilly, and Emerson, and James Martineau; your mind runs too much in one groove, and that's bad for you. Suppose you put yourself under my direction for a change?"

"I'll read anything you tell me to," she said, a sense of new happiness stealing over her.

"That's right," he answered, resuming his seat by the fire. "I scarcely expected to find you so manageable. It's the greatest mistake in the world to read nothing but books on one side of a question. You remember Toinette's ironical recommendation to Argan that he should poke out one of his eyes in order to see better with the other? Well, that's an allegory."

"I stand convicted," laughed Madame Mirabel. "And now let me give you some tea. Yes, I dare say one is apt, rather, to get into a groove. But after all, doesn't it save one from bewilderment, or at least confusion? There are so many points of view, you know, each producing its own system so naturally and so logically that the fair-minded person finds himself in a perfect maze unless he adopts one and then adheres to it. I can conceive a dozen systems, each apparently complete in itself, but all hopelessly irreconcilable with one another because based on a dozen different standpoints; where, then, is the use of familiarizing one's self with so many? Life is too short by far. I prefer to choose my standpoint to begin with, and then go straight on wherever the road may lead me. To be continually vacillating and oscillating from side to side as some do—I would as soon spend my time running round and round in a circle. Such a method leads no one anywhere."

"And if your straight line suddenly comes to an end?" asked Lancaster smiling, as he stirred his tea.

"How do you mean?"

"Well—supposing it lands you in a contradiction, or a manifest absurdity, or a conclusion plainly at variance with facts," he replied.

"In that case, always supposing I had not strayed from the road, I should turn back and try another direction, convinced that I had taken the wrong way at the outset," answered Madame Mirabel. "I may have to do it yet—I cannot tell. But I candidly don't think it's likely."

"I am sure you would be honest enough to acknowledge it, if ever your views did change," said Lancaster.

"I think I should," she replied. "I fancy sometimes that beliefs are very much a matter of temperament, even with the most strong-minded. How different we always were in that respect—Gaston and I. We never saw alike."

"No, I suppose not," said Lancaster, thoughtfully.

Madame Mirabel hesitated a moment or two, in case he might have something to add. He said nothing further, however, and she went on,

"Do you remember that curious theory of his about the existence and survival of what he called his 'mind-body'?"

"Yes, certainly," answered Lancaster.

"What is your own opinion?" she asked, with more anxiety than she cared to show.

"Well, I always thought it an ingenious hypothesis," he replied; "not to be accepted as proved, of course, but affording a certain basis for investigation. I've never considered it very much, however; I've been thinking more of *him*."

"Ah, yes," she said, in a low voice.

"I believe in the continuation of life after death," he went on, "though what the conditions of such an existence may be I cannot of course guess. But if this life were all, the universe would be a failure as regards every individual born into it; and I altogether reject the notion that the Power who has brought us into being intends to put us to permanent intellectual confusion."

"And where do you suppose Gaston now is?" she asked, with a strange thrill running through her.

"How can I tell?" he replied. "In Saturn, perhaps, or Mars. Or he may never have left the earth. Perhaps he's in this very room—now, while we are speaking."

"Oh, hush!" she exclaimed. "No, no; all that is a dream. It cannot be. It is opposed to all scientific analogy, this belief in the persistence of individual consciousness. Come, let us talk of more practical matters. I think I've heard you say you have a good memory. Do you remember where you were just seven years ago?"

"Seven years ago?" repeated Lancaster, with a smile. "Let me see. No, I don't think I do. Why?"

"I remember very well," said Madame Mirabel, lying back in her chair and gazing dreamily into the fire.

"What—where *I* was?" he asked, laughing.

She nodded slowly without looking at him, and smiled too, a little.

"Well?"

"On board the *Mirzapore*, in the Red Sea," she answered. "We had travelled together from Southampton; have you forgotten?"

I was with those people—the Leslies, you know—on my way out to the East.”

“Yes, that is true. Is it only seven years ago? It seems an age,” said Lancaster.

“I enjoyed that voyage very much,” she continued. “It was the first time I had ever been out of Europe, and everything was fresh and interesting. I was going out as governess in the family of the Belgian Minister, you know, and it was there that I first met Gaston.”

“True, true,” said Lancaster. “How much has happened since! It seems as though we are different persons now from what we were then. I little thought we should ever meet each other again.”

“It was a pleasant time—a very pleasant time,” continued Madame Mirabel, in the same musing tone. “I remember how I used to enjoy leaning over the taffrail at night and watching the phosphorescence. And some of the people were so delightfully amusing, too. I was sorry when we reached Colombo.”

“Ah, we separated at Colombo, to be sure,” said Lancaster, falling into the retrospective mood. “Yes, it seemed quite a break-up, didn’t it? It’s wonderful how intimate people often get at sea, though on that particular voyage I, for one, made very few acquaintances.”

“Do you know what they used to call you on board?” asked Madame Mirabel, with a slight, mischievous smile.

“Call *me*?” repeated Lancaster, laughing. “What, do you mean a nickname? No, indeed I don’t; I had no idea I’d been so highly honored. What was it, pray?”

“They called you ‘The Master of Ravenswood,’” she replied, glancing at him as she spoke.

“Really!” exclaimed Lancaster, much amused. “Well, I was quite unconscious of it. But why ‘The Master of Ravenswood’?”

“It was some silly girl who started it,” replied Madame Mirabel. “I suppose it was because you were tall and dark, and had a melancholy air, and scarcely spoke to any one. You *were* very reserved, you know. I believe we were almost the only people you ever condescended to associate with.”

“Ah,” said Lancaster, briefly, a shadow coming over his face. “Yes, I dare say that’s true enough. I was not in tune with society just then.”

Madame Mirabel looked inquiringly at him, but said nothing.

Lancaster himself continued silent for some moments, and appeared lost in thought. At last he said :

"I'm not much given to talking about myself, and it was scarcely likely that I should take chance passengers on board a mail-steamer into my confidence. But I need have no reserves from you, situated as we are now. The plain truth is this: I had just suffered the most crushing sorrow that can fall to the lot of man, and had left England in hopes of recovering my equilibrium."

"Is that so, really?" exclaimed Madame Mirabel, softly. "Of course I had no idea of such a thing. I am grieved to hear it, although it is so long ago."

Lancaster rose from his chair, and stood with his back to the fire, leaning against the mantel-piece. All his cheerfulness seemed to have vanished; he looked stern and sorrowful.

"I may as well tell you about it," he said, gravely. "There is no reason why I shouldn't. It was in the month of March that we found ourselves fellow-passengers upon the *Mirzapore*. Just three years previously I had become engaged to be married."

Madame Mirabel drew a quick, short breath.

"I need not dwell upon the intensity of the affection which existed between us," Lancaster continued, in a half-stifled voice. "No sympathy could have been more complete; we were like one soul. Indeed, I can scarcely remember making her a formal offer of marriage; we became betrothed to each other intuitively, as it were—almost without being conscious of the fact. At that time I was poor, and had still my career to make. It was impossible to marry at once. Of course this was a trial, but common enough. We had to wait our chance like other people, and that period of waiting, which I then thought so intolerable, I now look back upon as the happiest portion of my life."

Clever woman as she was, Madame Mirabel had never for a moment taken into consideration the possibility of there having been a romance in Lancaster's past. Strange, that such a thing should never have occurred to her! His was no virgin heart, then. He had already loved; had lost also, apparently—which was something; but how if the love were not dead? A rush of bitter jealousy—for there is such a thing as retrospective jealousy—came over her, coupled with fear. She could frame no words, and simply waited in silence.

"The happiest portion of my life," he repeated, slowly. "It was brightened by her constant companionship, and by the pros-

pect of still greater happiness eventually. Yes, those were golden days. And they grew even brighter towards the end, for by an unexpected stroke of good-fortune I was appointed one of the house-surgeons to a certain newly-opened hospital in the immediate neighborhood. This was a great step for me. We had known each other then for nearly four years, and had been engaged for about three. Now it really looked as though our long probation was at an end. I had a trifle of money of my own, and so had she; and now came this appointment, which was likely to lead to something better before long. The question of our immediate marriage was mooted. It would have been a risk, of course—and there were the objections of friends on both sides to be overcome. At last we determined to venture it.

"I left her house after the decision had been come to, scarcely believing in my own happiness. We were to be married in a week, and nothing would content me but going to buy the wedding-ring at once. How well I remember the little jeweller's-shop in the country town, and my own nervousness as I made the purchase! And yet it seems centuries ago. Well, I began my new duties the next day, and was too busy to go to see her again. The work delighted me, for I took the deepest interest in it, and felt I could acquit myself satisfactorily. You may judge if I didn't think myself the luckiest dog on earth! Then—the day after—I was in my own room—when an attendant came and called me. A new case had been brought in—an accident—and I was wanted. I caught up one or two instruments, and followed the messenger into the accident ward. It was a lady. She was lying on a bed. I did not see her face at first. Then I went up to her—and looked."

Lancaster paused abruptly.

"It was she," he resumed, in an almost inaudible tone. "And she was quite dead. She had been knocked down by a runaway horse, and killed upon the spot."

"How unutterably shocking!" ejaculated Madame Mirabel, really startled.

"There was only one thing that saved my reason," said Lancaster. "The agony was too keen to last uninterruptedly; and there came into my mind the serious suggestion of suicide. It seemed to me impossible that any one—God, devil, or man—could really wish that I should continue to endure the awful anguish that had come upon me. If I were to kill myself, I argued, I should either

put an end to it altogether, or I might have a chance of rejoining my dear one in whatever state or sphere she might be. The consideration comforted me, and afforded me the pause, the relief, I required. Well, that helped me to live through it, somehow. I did not succumb to the temptation. I hesitated, and in the course of hesitation I began to regain my self-control. Meanwhile she was moved to her father's house, and in the delirium of my love I swore I would marry her yet. On her dead finger, as she lay in her coffin, I placed the ring I had bought, and vowed that I would be faithful to her forever."

For some minutes Madame Mirabel said nothing. Her mind was in a turmoil. A wild storm of the most passionate jealousy swept over her, and deprived her of all power of utterance. And a terrible dread, too, held her dumb. Had she, after all, a rival—a rival who, though dead for years, was still more powerful than she? Against such an adversary, one who yet held the fortress she was besieging, who could wrestle? It was a bitter and humiliating moment. Then she rose, and drew near to where he stood.

"I only wonder you survived it," she said, quietly. "I cannot say how deeply I sympathize with you—how much I admire you for your fortitude. And it was then that you left England?"

Lancaster nodded. "Of course I could not continue in the hospital. I resigned my post, and through the kindness of friends I obtained temporary employment in Madras. I was on my way there when I fell in with you."

"Ah!" she said, under her breath.

"I have never been the same man since," he resumed. "It revolutionized me altogether—my character, my opinions, my views of life. Work was a difficult affair at first, but eventually it proved my salvation. I now live for nothing else."

"I am glad you have told me this," said Madame Mirabel, after a pause. "I know you better now than I did before. It makes me feel more truly than ever your friend."

"We can sympathize with each other," he said, taking her hand with that rare smile which is so different from the smile of ordinary cheerfulness. "We are companions in sorrow, for we have both suffered. I was so glad when I heard that you were living here. It was an additional reason for taking over the practice. If only I could have been of greater use to you!"

Madame Mirabel had no desire to follow the train of thought

suggested in the last sentence. "You are of use to every one," she said, "and more especially to me. But don't say you live for nothing but work. I do not say that such a life is anything but noble, but surely work is only part of life—surely life is broad enough to take in more than that. There may be possibilities of happiness in store for you even yet, and it is not good to remain in bondage to the past forever. Don't you think so yourself?"

He looked at her for a moment, thoughtfully. "Perhaps so," he replied. "In any case, believe me that your friendship is very dear to me. And now I think I must be going."

She did not seek to detain him. In fact, she rather longed to be alone. She wanted to think over all he had been telling her, to study the new conditions which the story of his life had opened up, to try and discover exactly how far her own prospects might be affected by what she now knew. It might prove a death-blow to her hopes; it might prove a powerful instrument in her hand for increasing her ascendancy over him. All this required thought.

"You must let me come in again soon," he said in his ordinary tone, as he prepared to leave. "Nothing rests me so much as a cup of tea and a chat. By-the-way, will you let me take away this book? I should like to dip into it a bit. I'll send you on Flint and one or two more to-morrow."

He took the volume from the shelf, tucked it under his arm, and pressed her hand warmly. The next moment she was alone.

She sank into the chair from which she had just risen, and fell into a profound reverie. The room was almost dark now; a slight radiance, however, came from the fire, and she was too much pre-occupied to ring for lights. Her first sensations were those of jealousy, pure and simple. It tortured her to think that Lancaster's heart had ever been given to another woman. Love is strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave; she felt no pity for the girl who had been killed on the eve of her long-expected marriage—rather, indeed, a fierce joy, a vindictive satisfaction, in the thought that by her removal the man had been set free. But none the less did the fact of his early love for some one else lacerate her like a whip; and the smart of it was intensified by the suspicion, the dread, lest his heart should be still buried in the girl's grave. He was probably not an easy subject to impress. He was no ordinary "marrying man," ready and even eager to "console himself," as the phrase goes, for the loss of one by accepting the ad-

vances of another. No, he would have to be handled very tenderly, very skilfully. Still, the chances of victory were not small. She had no living rival, at any rate. As far as she knew, he had very few friends at all; certainly no intimates; none who occupied so near and so confidential a position towards him as she herself. She recalled his last words, and dwelt upon them avidly. Her friendship, he had said, was "very dear" to him. He had told her the story of his life, and had told it to no one else. Such friendship, such confidence, might surely be fanned into love. Might? It should be, it must be. She had paid her price, and she would have the value of it.

The shadows deepened, and still she sat there, thinking, thinking, thinking. Nearly an hour passed. How dares the bad soul turn in upon itself, and look face to face upon its own deformity? And yet this woman shrank not from the sight, but surveyed it with a calm indifference, a calculating, cold impartiality divorced from the faintest semblance of moral sensitiveness. She experienced no revulsion, no uneasiness even, when her thoughts turned backward, and, leaving the problems of her future, rehearsed the dreadful tragedy of six months before. *Gaston had to die*, and he died. That was the condition of her liberty, of the crowning of her hopes, of the gratification of her love. It was with him now as though he had never been. Of what, then, should she repent?

Gradually, as she sat there, she became conscious of a strange chill stealing down her spine. She shivered slightly, and mechanically drew her chair a little nearer to the fire; then a faint sound as it were of sighing perplexed her ears, and she felt a certain oppression in her breath. The room was now almost entirely dark. What was happening? As we have already said, she was not a nervous woman; but here was an indication that the familiar and now dreaded influences were again coming upon her from without, and, strengthening and intensifying every minute, might eventually gain the mastery over her. For a moment she felt tempted to ring the bell. She tried to do so, in fact, but some unseen power seemed to intervene, and she found herself unable to move. Then a crawling, deadly, horrible sensation crept over her, curdling her blood and paralyzing the natural action of her brain. She made a violent effort to resist it. She endeavored to fix her thoughts on some indifferent subject, the contemplation of which would involve a strong mental exertion. The alleged intuitiveness

of the idea of motion had recently been interesting her, and she attempted to go over the arguments *pro* and *con*. She had also been dipping into a treatise of Lobatschewsky's on Transcendental Geometry, and she now tried to force herself into meditating upon the aberration of parallaxes as accounted for by the hypothetical curvature of space. A wholesome diversion, truly, if it had been possible! But it was not possible. She was foiled, beaten, overcome. A dreadful impression pervaded her mind that, since she had been left alone, something had entered the room. At last she could bear it no longer. With a tremendous effort she staggered to her feet and turned round, staring, in speechless horror, into the corner opposite to where she stood. There, gradually assuming shape out of the obscurity, stood the figure of a man. And its hollow, stern, reproachful eyes gazed at her till they seemed to burn into her very soul. Human nature could hold out no longer, and with a piercing shriek the woman fell prone upon the carpet in a swoon.

It was Dr. Mirabel.

CHAPTER XXIII

MADAME MIRABEL GIVES ADVICE

THE legacy bequeathed to him by the old lady now deceased was a source of very natural and sincere gratification to Gerard. It would be unjust to say that his dependence hitherto upon his parents had ever galled him ; and still wider of the truth that he loved money for money's sake. At the same time the notion of being "independent" was as sweet to him as it is to everybody, and vision after vision arose within him of how he would shape his life. He had now no longer any need to work for a living, and, should he wish to travel, he could do so without asking his father for a penny. But nothing was further from his mind than any wish to idle. His brain was too active for that. No, he still longed to work—to do something and to make himself somebody—and whatever he did must be something fraught with usefulness to his fellow-creatures. Many of the schemes which presented themselves to his reflection were Utopian enough, no doubt. The elevation of the masses—the correction of prevalent error (for the dreams of authorship came upon him now in forceful and fascinating shapes)—the alleviation of suffering—the pursuit of speculative truth—all these and other projects passed in turn before him, and occupied his mind with a sort of pleasurable embarrassment. It must be confessed that he gave only a passing thought to the Leper Settlement in Saghalien. Surely he might do good and useful work in the world without so tremendous a sacrifice. He was scarcely called upon to risk his life, particularly at this special juncture, when the world offered so wide and so attractive a field for his newly-awakened energies. It would be unwise, he reasoned, to aim too high. He could scarcely feel sure that he was of the stuff of which martyrs were made. No—the world had suddenly grown too bright, too beautiful, too attractive, to be given up just now. He longed to see more of it, to learn more about it, now that he had the chance. It was to be his field of labor, and he would not too hastily choose one corner

of it—and that the hardest and remotest corner, too. At any rate, he would do nothing without advice.

And whom should he ask to advise him? His parents, dear, good souls, understood him not at all. Their ideals were as different from his as the poles from the equator. To make plenty of money easily and respectably, to observe the conventionalities, never to do anything or be anything that other people did not or were not, to wear a tall hat and well-fitting clothes, to go to church on Sundays and believe everything the preacher said, to read nice, proper, commonplace books with no disturbing “new” ideas in them, and to marry a nice, proper, commonplace young lady like Rosie Chattering, without any ideas at all—that was what his parents would naturally wish their son to do. And it was precisely what Gerard vowed he never would do, and never would attempt to do. Besides which, his father would no doubt give him very dangerous advice about the investment of his new fortune. Four per cent. was a poor return, after all, and good Mr. Palliser, had he had the handling of it, would have immediately sold out and invested the proceeds in some brand-new and very speculative enterprise—some wonderful invention, or manufacture, or industrial undertaking, of the technicalities of which he was profoundly ignorant himself, but which would yield ten or even fifteen per cent. upon the capital—on paper. No, he would not take his parents into counsel. Lancaster would be a safer guide than they. He would probably advise Gerard to adopt one of the professions—medicine or law—and to go in for it with the earnest, concentrated will of a man who has his own way to make in the world, his own fortune to carve. Such advice would be undoubtedly excellent; and yet Gerard could scarcely bring himself at once to the idea of being either a doctor or a lawyer, or indeed of setting such a limit to his activity as the adoption of any specific money-making craft. His mind was in too fluid a state at present to take so definite a direction, for the unpractical side of his father's character had really been inherited by Gerard himself, though, as it reappeared in a somewhat different form, he failed to recognize it as such. It was now that he thought of Madame Mirabel. She, at any rate, would understand him; and, understanding him, would be able to point out the very path for him to follow.

His reflections here grew complicated. There was now no reason, from a worldly standpoint, why he should not offer himself to her at once. He had a comfortable little sum in ready money,

and three hundred pounds a year; she had almost half as much again, which would bring their united incomes up to very nearly eight hundred pounds. Certainly, he was no bad match for her so far; if only she could be got to regard him in the desired light! That was the weak point. He felt that she was necessary to him, but was by no means so sure that he was necessary to her. She had the strength, the matured will, the definiteness of aim, that he lacked; but what had he to offer her in return? Nothing but admiration, and unbounded confidence, and what he believed was love. Very likely she did not care for such things, did not value them, had never felt her need of them. And now he told himself that everything must depend upon her decision. His whole future life rested in her hands.

Such were the thoughts that revolved in his mind the day after his grandmother's funeral, as he was strolling quietly through Whitmore Bottom. It was a bright, mild, exquisite April day—one of those days of heaven upon earth that beguile the least sanguine of us into a delusion that the fair spring weather has really set in at last, and that there will be no more snow, no more east winds, no more nipping frosts. The day, in fact, was an emblem of Gerard's own mind. The sudden, unexpected gleam of prosperity that had come into his life had melted the frosts and brightened the gloom of his constitutional pessimism, and as he sauntered along through the sweet air he began to realize the fact that life might prove worth living after all. And yet it was ordained that the air he was inhaling with such enjoyment should not continue genial and balmy until the summer-time. There was yet to be a break; April was to have more than one snowstorm, and even May its share of bitter winds, and sprinklings of morning ice, and frowning, gloomy skies.

"My whole future rests in her hands," he repeated to himself, musingly; and as the thought passed through him he looked up, and saw the woman herself. She was advancing slower than was her wont, and as she approached it was impossible for Gerard not to notice how thin, and haggard, and pale she looked. It seemed, to her, indeed, as though her long agony had almost reached its crisis. For months she had fought and struggled against the incessant but undefinable terrors which assailed her. For months she had been true to her creed, and refused to acknowledge even to herself the objective reality of those unseen influences. She had immersed herself in books, she had surrounded herself with such

society as the place afforded, she had concentrated her thoughts upon the one great scheme of her life—the acquisition of the hand of Lancaster. But it was all to no purpose. *She had seen her murdered husband.* Her psychological knowledge assured her that the appearance was no more than an hallucination, but there was something within her that contradicted that. The suspicion grew stronger and stronger that the Theory *he* had held and cherished might be a true one, and that her own materialism was a gigantic error. And she felt that the dead man was more powerful than she, that he had been working against her all the time, that retribution was coming fast upon her, and that her eventual defeat was sure. Yet she never swerved from her purpose. She told herself over and over again that no physical weakness of hers, no shadowy wraith from the unseen world, should stand between her and Lancaster. Let her but preserve her reason, and she would have her will in spite of everything. The conviction of Gaston's superior power was instantly met by the determination that she would resist it to the uttermost, and fight a hand-to-hand battle with her terrible and relentless enemy to the very death.

It had been some time before she awoke from her swoon, and although she went to bed immediately and took a composing draught, the shock to her system proved severe. Nothing but her iron will could have carried her through the hours that supervened. Then a thought struck her, and she sent a verbal message to Lancaster that she was ill. He came round during the forenoon, and was shocked at her appearance—prescribed rest, sleep, change of air, and so on. She told him of her seizure and the sensations which had preceded it, but did not touch upon the catastrophe which had caused it. He looked grave, though not uneasy; said something about nervous exhaustion and want of tone, and suspected functional derangement of the heart. "You must put yourself entirely into my hands," he said, and she vowed that nothing would please her better. It was a double salvation that she now sought in the protection of Lancaster; not only could he and he alone satisfy the cravings of her love, but he alone could save her from the vengeance of the dead. No shadowy form, however threatening, could harm her while he was by. For the first time in her life she felt powerless single-handed. It was more than ever necessary now that her enterprise should succeed.

His manner to her on this occasion had betrayed unusual tenderness. It touched him to see this brilliant, self-reliant creature

prostrate, confiding, and so strangely soft. His heart beat ever so little faster as he bent over her and felt her pulse, and she, glancing up at him, promised obedience to his injunctions. Gradually he felt the fascination of her stealing over him. He promised to see her again the following day, and left regretfully.

"I am glad to have met you," said Madame Mirabel, as she held out her hand to Gerard. "There, never mind—I know what you're going to say. I know I'm looking ill. The fact is I've *been* ill, but am feeling better to-day, and have come out to see what a little exercise and fresh air will do for me."

"I'm very sorry to hear that," returned Gerard. "You've not been looking well for a long time. Don't you think it would be wiser—"

"Now, I'm not going to talk about myself," she interrupted, with a smile. "Tell me about your own affairs. I was so shocked to hear the other day of what had occurred. Wasn't it terribly sudden?"

They had stopped for a moment or two as they exchanged greetings, and now began to walk slowly on again, Gerard having turned into the same direction as Madame Mirabel. The meeting was as pleasant to him as it was unexpected; and he prepared to open his whole heart to her.

"You mean about my grandmother," he replied, slowly. "Yes—it was sudden enough. She died in her sleep, sitting in front of the window in the drawing-room. Of course she had been growing weaker for months past, and we all knew she couldn't live long. But we none of us expected the end to come when it did."

"It must have been a great shock," observed Madame Mirabel, sympathetically. "The funeral was to be yesterday, I believe?"

"Yes—she was buried yesterday," said Gerard.

A pause ensued, during which Gerard tried to brace himself for what he had to say. His constitutional reserve began to lay hold of him, and he felt an embarrassing reluctance to speak. But the impression was strong upon him that now, and now only, was the time.

"There's something I want to tell you and consult you about," he said at last, with an effort. "The fact is that the death of my grandmother has made a great difference in my—position."

"Yes?" exclaimed Madame Mirabel, with interest.

"She has left me three hundred a year, besides a certain sum of ready money," pursued Gerard, a warm flush mounting to his brow,

"Really!" ejaculated Madame Mirabel. "Well, I congratulate you warmly. I am sincerely glad to hear it. I know few persons in the world likely to make a better use of such a competency than you. And it will give you independence—one of the greatest boons in life. You will be your own master now."

"Yes," he said, in a musing tone. "That is what I value it for. I feel that I can shape my life as I like. But then comes the difficulty. How am I to shape it? What is the best thing I can do? That is the question I have been asking myself ever since I knew the provisions of the will, and I have not yet found an answer."

Madame Mirabel looked thoughtful. "No doubt, it is not a matter easy to decide off-hand," she said, after a pause, "nor is it a matter that should be so decided. Don't be in a hurry; wait, and the solution will come of itself. There could not be a greater mistake than to act precipitately in such a case. A Fabian policy is the best you can adopt just now."

"I was just on the point of asking your advice," said Gerard, smiling, "and you have anticipated me. Of course it would be imprudent to come to any premature decision; still, I can't help thinking about it, and wondering what I shall do. All my ideas are vague, and I want them put in some concrete shape. It's no use consulting my parents—they don't understand me, and never did. But you do understand me, I think. I want an object in life. Try and find me one, and you'll do me a most invaluable service."

"Well," said Madame Mirabel, adapting herself to his mood. "Let us see first what your capital consists of—what you have to work with, in fact. It appears to me that your assets may be divided under three heads: you have money (that is, independence), brains, and, I *think*, energy. Is that not so? Well," as he smiled rather uneasily, "we'll say latent, or potential, energy. It is true I've never seen you very energetic hitherto, but we'll allow, for argument's sake, that you can be energetic if you like. Now the first question to be decided is, whether you want to make more money, or whether you are satisfied with what you have?"

"That's easily answered," said Gerard; "I'm perfectly satisfied with what I have, and don't want to make a penny more."

"Well, then," replied Madame Mirabel, "I think that if I were you I should see what I could do in the way of authorship. You have literary tastes, and can afford to write without depending on your exertions for an income. Choose some special subject—the literature of some particular age and country, for instance; study

it, read it up, saturate yourself with it, make it your own, and then begin to write about it. That is a suggestion which may lead to others, even if you don't adopt it. Or there's science. Take up physics. What can be more intralling than a research into the very nature of matter itself? It goes to the very root of things, and penetrates more deeply than any other study into the profoundest mysteries of existence. I can conceive no grander subject. The science of physics contains the key to *everything*. When we once understand the nature which underlies and informs the ultimate elements of matter, we shall be on the high-road to the knowledge of everything there is to be known. Controversies will be at an end, and superstition a thing of the past. You say you want an object in life? Well, there is one for you. I cannot suggest a better."

Gerard paused a moment or two. "I have only one remark to offer," he said, hesitatingly. "The very feature about the things you suggest that prompts you to recommend them to me is in itself an objection. You speak of them as attractive. That is just what I am afraid of. They are too attractive. What is the moral value of a pursuit that one enjoys? I see in such a life nothing but a sort of refined selfishness. I might make no end of wonderful discoveries in either literature or science, but who would be practically benefited? While I was enjoying myself, others would still be suffering in one way or another; I shouldn't benefit those whom I might be helping, neither should I be doing anything of the slightest moral value to myself. Give me some more useful task than these."

Madame Mirabel turned towards him with a look of undisguised amusement. "A philanthropist!" she exclaimed, with a light laugh. "Nay, then you have come to the wrong person. I should say that the rector, now, might prove an apter counsellor. No doubt he would be delighted with your assistance. I believe he has a night-school somewhere—and a blanket-club, or something of the sort, and various other institutions for the purveyance of creature comforts to the poor of his flock. If that is the kind of thing you're thinking of, you'll find an ample field for your operations anywhere."

"You don't really mean what you say," protested Gerard, feeling sore. "A man may surely do some good in the world without participating in parochial charities. No—the only thing that has really occurred to me as practicable is work

among the poorer class of artisans. I don't mean slumming, exactly, but something like it. I should like to do something to brighten their homes, and enlighten their minds, and bring a little intellectual interest and activity into their lives generally. There are such numbers of people in the world who simply vegetate. I should like to stir them up a bit, and induce them if possible to *live*. Surely you can sympathize with me in that?"

"I can and I do," said Madame Mirabel, gently. "Of course I was not in earnest just now. Yes, I think your idea is a very good one, and I should like you to succeed in it. Certainly the next best thing to enlightening our own minds is attempting to do the same for others."

Gerard's heart now beat fast. He had not sought this opportunity — had not even imagined that it was to come to him; but here it was. Should he speak, or not?

"I'm glad I have your sympathy," he said at last. "That is one step towards—something else. Do you think you have sufficient sympathy with my scheme to induce you to co-operate?"

"Co-operate?" echoed Madame Mirabel, surprised. "How do you mean? I don't think I could go to London and live among your artisans. I will help you, of course, as far as I can; though I scarcely see in what way I can do so. I have no experience of such work—my mind has been directed towards other subjects, subjects which you would no doubt consider unprofitable enough. How do you wish me to co-operate with you?"

Gerard made no answer for some moments. He longed to speak the word, but his constitutional reserve quite overcame him, and he dreaded the result. He felt that the crisis of his whole life was upon him—and he hesitated in an agony of indecision. At last a rushing impulse came to the rescue. Had he once more stopped to think he would probably never have spoken. For one brief instant he had the courage of despair.

"You might marry me," he said.

It was done, and the sky seemed whirling round his head. Madame Mirabel stopped short in her walk, dumfounded by this sudden declaration. For a moment or two a strange thought passed through her mind. So terrible had been the strain upon her during the last few months, so keen the anguish, so importunate her need for protection and support, that she felt she might even have been driven to accept Gerard had there been no chance of Lancaster. But of course the consideration had no weight

with her now. Her scheme was prospering, and there was no necessity, even, for playing off one against the other. Gerard must be refused, though kindly; for Madame Mirabel never wantonly inflicted pain — never wounded any one, unless there were something to be gained by it.

"I never meant to take you by surprise," continued Gerard, feeling somewhat calmer. "And it is not so sudden, after all. You have known what I have felt for you for months—I never said much, but you knew it for all that. This is no sudden impulse on my part. Ever since I first became intimate with you I grew conscious that you were the only woman in the world I could ever care for. I am devoted to you entirely. Without you my life will be a blank. You understand me as no one else does, and I am never happy but when I am with you. I did not speak before—how could I? Your widowhood was so recent—and I had nothing to offer you; but now—well, I am afraid I have spoken too soon, even as it is, for my grandmother was only buried yesterday. You must forgive me all that. I have been enduring a martyrdom of suspense for weeks and weeks. I have spoken sooner than I intended, but I could not bear it any longer. I am in a position to marry now, and—my love for you—is infinite."

This was perhaps the longest speech that Gerard had ever made. It gave Madame Mirabel time to collect her thoughts, and frame a suitable reply.

"Gerard," she said, very quietly, "do you know how old I am?"

He tossed his head with an impatient gesture.

"I am over twenty-eight," she continued; "just seven years older than yourself. When you are still a young man, looking perhaps very much as you look now, I shall be a middle-aged woman with a careworn face that you will not love to gaze at. Don't interrupt me. Women age far more rapidly than men like you; why, I have aged terribly already since my husband's death, as even you must see. No, Gerard, I am too old for you; you must marry a younger woman."

"That is a consideration for me, not for you," replied Gerard, impulsively. "I care nothing about your age; I wouldn't have you different from what you are in any respect. Please state your next objection—if you have one."

Madame Mirabel smiled slightly. "Yes, there are several, I am afraid," she said. "What sort of a reception would your mother give me, do you suppose? She has been very kind to me, but she

cannot really like me—there is absolutely nothing in common between us. Besides, she has set her heart upon your marrying Rosie Chattering. Now nothing would induce me to enter a family in which I should be unwelcome.”

“I have told my mother in plain terms that I will not marry Miss Chattering,” replied Gerard. “She is no longer under any delusions upon that point. And you would *not* be unwelcome,” he said, sturdily, though with a secret misgiving in his heart. “My mother likes you very much—she is always in extremes, you know—and my father admired you from the first. Besides, I am not asking you to marry them. It is not as though we were all going to live together. No, that plea has no force in it. My parents must be a secondary consideration to both of us in this matter. If you object to *me*, say so at once, and put me out of this intolerable suspense. Don’t trifle with me—my whole destinies are in your hands.”

“I cannot accept you, Gerard,” she said in a very quiet voice.

There was something in her intonation that struck Gerard somewhat curiously—something that conveyed to him a subtle impression that this non-acceptance was not exactly a refusal. It was as though she had said, “I cannot say Yes, but at the same time I do not say No”—and this somehow blunted the edge of his disappointment. He drew a short, quick breath, and waited for her to continue.

“Don’t imagine,” she resumed, “that I regard you otherwise than as a very dear and valued friend. Your kindness to my late husband, and your companionship since I was left alone, deserve every possible recognition at my hands. But just now I am in a very unsettled state. My life is scarcely at my own disposal. I am unwell, my nerves are unstrung, my plans entirely undecided. Sometimes I think I was unwise in remaining here at all—”

“All that is beside the mark,” interrupted Gerard, brusquely. “If you are unsettled and nervous, that is all the more reason why you should have some one with you to love you and protect you and devote himself to you entirely. No one will ever be more devoted to you than I!” he exclaimed with concentrated passion. “Think—think what you are doing before you refuse me. You *must* marry me, Julia. There! I have never called you Julia before, but I do now. It is rapture to me to utter the mere name. For God’s sake, answer me at once. I don’t ask you to marry me to-morrow. There’s time enough for that—you shall settle the time

yourself. I only want to know for certain that you will marry me some time. It is almost a matter of life and death to me. Don't play with me, I beseech you. Will you marry me, or will you not?"

"You impetuous wooer," she said, with a laugh so gentle that it did not pain him, "don't you know how very badly you are doing it? It is a great mistake to insist like that, believe me. I have already said that I cannot accept you. I say nothing about what may happen in less than a hundred years. If you force me to give you a still more definite reply, it will be a point-blank refusal. I shall say 'No, Gerard, neither now nor ever.' Therefore I advise you to leave the matter as it is. At present I have simply not accepted you. We are neither of us bound to the other."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gerard under his breath, "I spoke too soon."

Madame Mirabel made no reply, and Gerard's own perplexity prevented him from saying more. In truth he did not know what to make of it. It seemed that there was still a chance for him, at some indefinite future time. She had simply not accepted him; that is, she had virtually given him no answer at all; and she had hinted that in something less than a hundred years things might happen which could not happen now. But in the same breath she had said that if he insisted on an immediate reply it would be an unqualified refusal! Surely that was tantamount to a refusal, was it not? Gerard, unversed in women's ways, felt himself entirely at sea. He could make nothing out of it. Then the despondency that was natural to him began to assert its sway; the gloomier view of the situation supervened, and he felt unutterably wretched.

Scarcely another word was uttered until they reached the gate of Gorse Cottage, and Madame Mirabel gave him her hand in farewell. "Let me amend the advice I offered you this afternoon," she said. "Get away from this place as soon as this legacy affair is settled, and travel for two or three months. I am quite disinterested in this, for I tell you frankly that I shall miss you very much. But it would be the best possible thing for you. Go a walking tour in the Ardennes, or the Black Forest, or some perfectly new place. You want a change, and you've no idea how much good it would do you."

She pressed his hand, smiled, and vanished. Gerard turned away with a bitter look. Clearly she was anxious to be rid of him—to give him an opportunity, no doubt, of falling in love elsewhere. "Just like a woman," soliloquized Gerard in his unreason-

ing resentment. "They always inflict their worst stabs with a smile or a caress."

It was not a very cheerful dinner that evening. Gerard was unusually taciturn, and the recency of the old lady's death and funeral of course gave a subdued and sober turn to the conversation. Moreover, there had been some rather disturbing rumors in the City during the last day or two—rumors affecting the stability of one great commercial house and at least two well-known banks. The *Times* had come out that very morning with an alarmist article upon the position of affairs; prices were shaky on the Exchange, buyers were holding off, and there were many old shrewd City men who said that things would have to be very much worse before they were any better. It seemed as though the crisis of the previous autumn was to be repeated, and that this time it would not be tided over as it was before. Mr. Palliser's brow was overcast, and he threw out so many terrifying prognostications that his wife grew visibly anxious, and could scarcely eat anything at all. The fact was that nearly the whole of Mr. Palliser's fortune was locked up in some of the very rottenest securities on the market, and although everything went smoothly enough for some time, as long as fair weather lasted, and the good gentleman pocketed big dividends with considerable chuckling and complacency, at the very first indication of a squall the entire flotilla began to show signs of foundering. There were, indeed, serious grounds for anxiety, for the situation was so critical that the merest breath of political troubles might precipitate the disaster, and when the thing once began no one could divine where it would stop. Certainly the investments of Mr. Palliser would be among the first to suffer. Gerard's own small fortune, luckily, was safe enough, being invested in excellent mortgages. But all the rest of the family property looked in a very parlous state indeed.

This was on Tuesday evening. The two following days we must spend at Gorse Cottage, where important events are now about to happen.

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. JICKLING CATCHES COLD

Mrs. JICKLING returned from her expedition to London on Wednesday afternoon, bringing with her the proceeds of the sale. She had held high state in Augusta-Victoria Villas, and had enjoyed herself immensely. As soon as she arrived she gave out that, having suffered very serious reverses, it would be necessary for her to break up her establishment at No. 3; at present, she told Miss Twistleton (of No. 4), she was staying with her daughter, in her country-seat down in Hampshire, but she had decided that a separate establishment would be preferable in the long-run, and that she was probably going to settle upon the Continent. All this sounded very grand in the ears of the good-natured little old maid, who began to think that Mrs. Jickling must really have been a lady of fortune all along, as well as of high family. Reverses, indeed! With a rich daughter in the country, and a residence in foreign parts in prospect, such reverses must surely be of a most exceptional sort; Miss Twistleton would not have objected to suffering such reverses herself. Mrs. Jickling descanted eloquently upon her ruin, conveying the impression that she had lost a fortune; how rich, then, she must have been, seeing that she was now about to travel and reside abroad! Her dress, too, was so wonderfully improved, and she looked so much "the lady," that poor Miss Twistleton fell more than ever into the rôle of humble friend, and ministered more assiduously than before to the complacency and self-esteem of her late neighbor. A farewell tea-party was given in honor of Mrs. Jickling the evening before her departure, and when she finally drove off to Waterloo Station next morning in a hansom cab, the Park felt really proud of her.

She came back with thirty-five pounds in her pocket—a poor sum, she said, but all that the thief of an auctioneer had sold her effects for. Having now done with Royalty Park for good, and knowing that her prolonged residence at Hindhead was out of

the question, she was anxious to arrive at some decision about the future ; so when she had refreshed herself with a cup of tea, and began to feel a little rested after her journey, she leaned back in her chair and entered upon the subject at once.

"Well, Julia," she said, "and now tell me all your news. You said you were going to make inquiries about some place for me abroad. Have you heard of anything as is likely to suit?"

"I think so," replied Madame Mirabel, putting down her cup and producing a packet of papers from her desk. "Here are all the answers I have had; we'll go over them one by one." Then she arranged the letters on the table in front of her, and glanced carefully over them, while Mrs. Jickling looked anxiously on. "Let me see—ah, here it is. Just listen to this. A German family in the town of Weimar will receive you as a lodger for a year. The eldest daughter speaks a little English. The husband holds some post under the *Protocolsführer*, and their means are very limited. That is the only reason why they are willing to take you in. Of course they live very simply, and as the family seems pretty numerous you would have excellent opportunities of learning German."

"H'm! I don't think I should care for that, very much," said Mrs. Jickling, with a dissatisfied expression.

"Of course the life would be very quiet," replied Madame Mirabel; "still, Weimar is a good town in its way, and the living is wonderfully cheap. Those people will take you in for eighteen marks a week. However, there are several more to choose from. Here's one at Lausanne, on the Lake of Geneva—a regular *pension*, you know, with plenty of visitors, chiefly English and Americans; you can have any amount of gayety there, and all for five francs a day. It's a great big house, though—not very home-like, I expect."

"That sounds better," remarked Mrs. Jickling reflectively; "but we won't decide in a hurry. Put a mark against that. Haven't you got anything in England as 'ud do?"

"Yes, there are two or three in England," said Madame Mirabel, taking up another batch of covers. "Listen to this, now. No, that's not it. Ah, here. This is from a widow lady. Inhabits a small but comfortable house in the Dalston Road, fifteen minutes' walk from an important cab-stand, and commanding a cheerful view of the passing omnibuses. Desires to share the spiritual advantages offering in the vicinity with a serious lady of mature

years, who would not object to making her own bed. Terms, thirty shillings a week. No wine. Calvinist, redeemed."

"What in the name of fortune does the woman mean by that?" demanded Mrs. Jickling, in angry scorn.

"Well, she must either mean that *she's* a Calvinist redeemed, and states the fact for the enlightenment of any one who may answer her advertisement, or else that she insists on the applicant being one," replied Madame Mirabel seriously. "I don't know whether you could be considered in that light, I'm sure—that you know best yourself."

"Go on to the next," cried Mrs. Jickling. "Make my own bed, indeed! No wine, either! I think I *see* myself! No, thank you; none o' your hypocritical skinflints for me—not on this occasion. 'Pon my word, I'd like to set eyes on that widow, just out o' curiosity."

"She may be a most estimable person, remarked Madame Mirabel, taking up another envelope. "But there's no need to force your inclinations, if you don't care for it. Now we come to something different. This is from Upper Norwood—a charming neighborhood. A young married couple, whose honey-moon is just over, are desirous of meeting with an elderly lady of experience, who has some knowledge of cookery. They hint that, being utterly without experience of house-keeping themselves, they want some one to undertake that duty for them. Also that, owing to a certain incompatibility of temper, they think that the presence of a third person would be desirable, in order to relieve them from the embarrassment of an unbroken tête-à-tête. Drawing-room furnished à la *Louis Quinze*. Gold and silver elephants on the mantel-piece. The gentleman's salary is narrow, and he has liabilities. An addition to their income is therefore necessary. Applicants who could influence orders in the coal-trade would be preferred."

"A couple o' young fools!" snorted Mrs. Jickling. "Tired of each other already, and no money to pay the butcher's bill. A pretty prospect, indeed—a woman like me goin' to the rescue. Want me to cook for them, I s'pose, too. You needn't answer that, Julia. Isn't there a good boarding-house on your list?"

"Yes, there's one in Finsbury," said Madame Mirabel, "but it doesn't sound very inviting. I fancy it's one of those stuffy places that always smell of boiled cabbage. There's one more in England—another family. Shall I read it?"

"Well, you can read it," said Mrs. Jickling in a discouraging minor. "It's not likely to be any good, I expect."

"The advertiser," replied Madame Mirabel, looking at a paper, "is a widowed clergyman of narrow means, who wishes to hear of some benevolent elderly lady willing to reside at the Vicarage and be a sort of grandmother to his nine children. The children appear to have been rather spoiled, as the clergyman speaks of them as unaccustomed to restraint; but he believes in the rule of love rather than in that of fear, and it must be understood that under no circumstances are they to be thwarted or rebuked. The influence of an elderly Christian lady, to coax them into obedience, will, he thinks, be the most efficacious remedy; but she must make herself beloved from the very first, otherwise the arrangement cannot stand. In return she will enjoy not only the advantages of a happy Christian home, a romantic village, and a useful life, but occasional intercourse with the best county families in the neighborhood; the terms for which will be seventy-five pounds a year, paid quarterly in advance."

"I do believe you're making it all up, Julia," ejaculated Mrs. Jickling. "Of all impudent swindlers I ever come across, commend me to that clergyman. Grandmother, indeed! I'd grandmother him and his spoilt brats too, if I once got inside his 'ouse. Why, Julia, you've been regular put upon, I declare if you 'aven't. But come, that ain't all. You've 'ad some more answers from the Continent, I know."

"Well, as to the Continent, there really need be no difficulty," answered Madame Mirabel. "There are scores of *pensions* that would suit—*pensions* where you could live comfortably for four marks or five francs a day, according to whether you preferred Germany or Switzerland. The only thing is, we must be careful to fix on a place that is kept going all the year round. Some of them, you know, only open for the season. Now here is one that I really think will do. It is in Heidelberg, and is called the 'Pension Scheibler.' The people are half English, and talk English as well as they do German, and they say they'll take you in for sixty pounds a year—on the understanding, of course, that you stay with them at least a twelvemonth. Heidelberg is one of the prettiest towns in Germany. You can get anything you want there; and then you have the Stadtgarten and the castle grounds and the promenades where the band plays every evening and sometimes oftener, and good English society, and a stream of visitors constantly

coming and going. I don't believe, myself, that you'll do better than that. It'll be cheap and cheerful. What do you think yourself?"

"It don't sound bad," said Mrs. Jickling. "Seems to me we've got to choose between that and the one at Lausanne. We'll think it over and see what's best to be done. I suppose I can take a day or two to consider, for I don't want to buy a pig in a poke—in foreign parts, especially."

"There's no need for any undue haste," replied Madame Mirabel. "I think myself that Heidelberg would suit you best. The house there is not too large; it only accommodates about twenty visitors, and would be altogether more homelike than that huge place at Lausanne. The town is ever so much prettier, too. What a change it will be for you after Stockwell!"

While Madame Mirabel was speaking, Mrs. Jickling's countenance had been undergoing a series of changes suggestive of some impending cataclysm, and, as she ceased, the convulsive working of the good lady's muscles culminated in a stentorian and resounding sneeze, which shook her frame from head to foot, and set the very windows ringing.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Madame Mirabel, jumping. "You seem to have caught cold."

Instead of replying, Mrs. Jickling underwent another process of muscular agitation, and, screwing up her eyes, again emitted a sneeze which combined the reverberating sound of an explosion with a sort of despairing bellow. Three or four times was the unfortunate woman subjected to similar throes, and then, exhausted by her efforts, she lay back in her chair, panting and overspent.

"I knew it!" she gasped at length. "I've caught a most fearful cold. There was an imp of a boy in the train this morning as would keep the window open behind me, drat 'im, and I got my feet badly wet yesterday afternoon and 'adn't time to change 'em till I got back again. I was sure I sh'd suffer sooner or later, and now I believe I'm in for it. If there is anything as makes me wild it is a cold in the 'ead. I'm beginnin' to feel quite shivery already."

Madame Mirabel stirred the fire into a fine cheerful blaze, and opened a well-stocked cupboard.

"Well, you must keep out of draughts," she said, "and see that you don't get worse. You do seem to have rather a bad cold, and we must try and nip it in the bud. A little hot brandy-and-water will be a good thing for you—unless you object to spirits."

Mrs. Jickling did not object to spirits, and in a few minutes was solacing herself with a steaming tumbler which appeared to comfort her considerably. She sipped and coughed alternately for some time, while Madame Mirabel gathered her papers together and locked up her desk; then the room began to grow dark, and the faint patter of rain-drops was heard upon the window-panes. For a quarter of an hour neither spoke. At last Madame Mirabel, wishing to read, got up and touched the bell.

"What's that for?" asked Mrs. Jickling, putting down her glass.

"I'm ringing for lights," she replied.

"We needn't have 'em just yet, need we?" said Mrs. Jickling, fretfully. "The light o' the fire's about as much as I can bear—it hurts my eyes, somehow."

"Oh, very well," assented her daughter. "I thought the lamp would be more cheerful."

Mrs. Jickling made no reply, and when the servant came up Madame Mirabel only told her to draw the curtains. Another period of silence supervened, broken at last by a sort of little grunt from the elder lady, who was lying back in her chair with closed eyes.

"Aren't you feeling well, mother?" asked Madame Mirabel, glancing at her.

"My head throbs," muttered Mrs. Jickling. "I dare say it's that brandy. It's got into my head, I expect, and my back feels as though I had cold water running down it."

"You'd better go to bed," suggested Madame Mirabel. "You seem a little knocked up, and want a good night's rest. You'll be all right to-morrow, if you take care of yourself now."

"I don't feel like moving," said her mother, in the same muffled tone.

Madame Mirabel thought it was perhaps unwise of her to have made her mother drink so strong a cordial, and that this was the result of it; but a scrutinizing look at the old woman's face caused her to reconsider the opinion. Mrs. Jickling's hand was hot, too, and her breathing labored. She was evidently in the first stage of a bad feverish cold, which ought not to be neglected; it would never do for her to fall seriously ill, for more reasons than we need set down here. Just then she opened her eyes, shading them with her hand from the glowing firelight.

"Yes, I'm in for a nasty cold," she said, rousing herself with an effort. "I feel a bit feverish, too—that's a sure sign. I dare say

you wouldn't mind telling 'em to make a bit o' fire in my room for me, Julia, and letting 'em bring me up a morsel o' dinner in bed. There's nothing like takin' these things in time, you know, and I don't mean to be laid up without knowin' the reason why."

Madame Mirabel told her mother she thought her very sensible, and, ringing the bell once more, gave the necessary order. In half an hour the room up-stairs was comfortably warm, and Mrs. Jickling accordingly retired between the blankets, with every intention of staying there until she felt quite well again; Madame Mirabel, who was anxious above all things to avoid calling in medical advice if possible, sedulously applauding her resolution. No doubt her mother would be better in the morning; but even if the worst came to the worst, and the doctor had to be summoned, it would not matter much, as they were entire strangers to each other.

Lancaster was sitting at his desk, next day, turning over the leaves of a large book. We have not hitherto seen our friend in his own house; indeed, being an active man with an extending practice, he was not often at home. On the present occasion, however, it so happened that there was nothing to take him out, and he was rather glad of the rest. The room in which he sat was in several ways characteristic of its occupant. The precise simplicity and good taste which distinguished his habitual costume were observable in the appointments of his house, and the study, where he passed most of his time, was well though plainly furnished. There are some men who, being bachelors, are content with rough and disorderly surroundings. Lancaster was not one of these. He was particular, fastidious even, as to table service, and had a keen eye for any irregularity or neglect; his furniture was severely simple, but solid, comfortable, and the best of its kind; and on dust he had no mercy. His house was, in fact, a model of neatness and order, and the books which lined his walls from floor to ceiling were so arranged as to enable him to place his hand without a moment's hesitation upon almost any volume he might happen to require. The one now before him, however, did not form part of his own library. It was, indeed, the book he had borrowed two or three days previously from Madame Mirabel, and he was now dipping into it here and there with a frown of half-amused perplexity upon his brow.

"What possible fascination can such a subject have for her?" he muttered to himself. "A clear-headed, healthy-minded young

woman like that—the last person in the world, one would have thought, to take an interest in hypnotism. How carefully she seems to have read it, too! So many pages marked”—turning over a few leaves and skimming the pages as he did so. “Yet she must have been paying attention to it for some time—I remember she jested with me once about hypnotizing that poor husband of hers, when he was getting well so rapidly. Well, there may be more in hypnotism than some people think, though if I’m a hypnotist there never was one more utterly unconscious of his own power.”

He stopped turning the leaves over, and held the book open at a page scored with a thick pencil-line from top to bottom.

“HYPNOTISM—ITS THERAPEUTIC VALUE. *Efficacy in the Removal of Mental Illusions and Dominant Ideas. Cure or Modification of Morbid Symptoms. Maintenance and Resuscitation of the Vital Powers.*”

Lancaster knit his brows and read attentively for some time. There were passages in the chapter which seemed to describe his own experiences in the case of Gaston Mirabel, and these interested him profoundly. The examples by which the writer’s theory was supported were still more striking—cases of steady, uninterrupted, if slow, improvement while the influence lasted, and rapid loss of ground if the influence was prematurely withdrawn. Something like a smothered curse rose in his throat as his thoughts reverted to the foul play which, as he was now sure, had cost poor Mirabel his life. He read on and on, oblivious of the passing time. Then he came to the last division of the chapter, the opening paragraph of which ran as follows:

“Just as, in the hands of a skilful, experienced, and benevolent operator, the hypnotic power may be potent for the cure of disease by the restoration of the vital energy, so, in malevolent or unskilful hands, its exercise may be attended with disastrous consequences; where skill merely is wanting, complications may arise from misdirection or inequality of appliance, while in cases of actual malevolence, the power may be used for the illicit subjugation of the patient’s will, and even for the extinction, instead of the resuscitation, of his vitality. In short, hypnotism may be employed as the instrument of safe and secret murder; its practice, therefore, should be safeguarded by the closest restrictions and severest penalties which governments have power to impose.”

He read the chapter to the end; then turned the pages back, and read the whole through once more. His mind was full of thought, yet it was thought that he found it impossible to clothe in words.

"Can I be on the brink of a discovery?" he asked himself at last. "Am I to find the key to the mystery in the horrible suggestions of this book? It is possible—though I never believed it myself—that the man's right, and that Mirabel's marvellous recovery was due to some occult influence or power exercised unconsciously by myself. His wife more than half believed it—or pretended to. Certain it is, that the moment my back was turned his vitality began to sink. So far, appearances are in favor of the theory. But there's more. What did Mirabel mean by crying out that I had come to save him—that he had died a thousand deaths, but now was going to live? It may be there was more in that than I suspected. Could there have been any sinister influence at work while I was away? The mere thought is horrible. Besides, who is open to suspicion? Who would want to harm him? Not the servants—not Gerard—not Charlton—not his wife. No, the facts don't fit in. And yet his death was mysterious. It was literally surrounded by mystery. Who sent that telegram? If I could only find that out, I believe I should discover the whole secret."

He rose from his chair, filled a pipe, and began to pace the room, smoking.

"When one is fumbling in the dark," he soliloquized, "without a glimmer or a clew, no hypothesis ought to be thrown aside simply because it sounds absurd or seems impossible. The facts in this case are so strange that their explanation is probably strange too. Suppose I say—the person who sent me that telegram did so in order to separate me from Mirabel. In that case, the person's ulterior object would be to injure either Mirabel or me. Injury to me could only mean injury to me in my profession. Injury to Mirabel could only mean—his death. Who wanted him to die? No, it won't do. And yet, supposing that some one did want him to die, and sent—or caused to be sent—that telegram, who killed him, if killed he was? There can be but one answer. It must have been the same false, murderous hand; the author of the message and the murderer of Mirabel must have been one and the same person!"

He gazed abstractedly out of the window for a few moments, and then resumed his walk.

"I'll talk it over with madame herself," he said, his teeth closing firmly over the mouthpiece of his pipe. "Of course she's as much in the dark about the telegram as I am, but she's wonderfully shrewd, and—" he stopped abruptly. "There's a curious

fascination about her," he continued, thoughtfully. "She's a sweet woman. Heigho! I wonder whether—I believe she likes me, and I'm not sure it's wise to go there often; it's rather an effort to keep away even now. I wonder what will be the end of it. I almost fancy I shall let myself drift. I've lived alone long enough; and if things were to come to a point, I think I could make her happy."

At that very instant the door opened, and a note from Madame Mirabel was put into his hands.

"Mrs. Jickling ill!" he muttered, raising his eyebrows. "I see—a severe cold, attended by strong fever. Very well," he said to the servant, "say I'll be round at two o'clock. 'The mysterious mother'—I am to see her at last, am I? I'd better have lunch at once."

He ate with the hearty appetite of a healthy man, but his thoughts continued as before. He could not get the mystery out of his head. The old puzzles worried him as much as ever. Who sent the telegram? Who knew anything about Bretschneider and his proposed conference? What friend or acquaintance of his or Mirabel's lived in Lucerne? And there was no reply. He went over the same old weary round again and again, and never got any further. And then his mind reverted to the terrible suggestions contained in the book he had borrowed from Madame Mirabel. But still he could see no light.

Madame Mirabel was writing in the dining-room when he was announced. She at once put down her pen, and, rising from her chair, welcomed him with a smile.

"I am really sorry to have been obliged to trouble you," she said, brightly. "The fact is that my mother caught a violent cold in London, and since her return she has had a good deal of fever. I thought it best to let you see her, and so did she; but she's not seriously ill, I'm glad to say. I fancy she only wants good nursing."

"You did perfectly right to send for me," said Lancaster, sitting in front of the fire. "Feverish colds can scarcely be attended to too promptly. And I'm always glad to come here, as you know."

A ray of happiness flashed across her face. "It is pleasant to hear you say that," she said softly. "Have you been working hard lately? You look pale, somehow."

"No, not more than usual," he said. "Indeed this is the first time that I've been out to-day."

"Yes?" she answered interrogatively.

"I was reading all the morning," he continued; "reading that book you were good enough to lend me the other day, and I got so much interested in it that I could scarcely put it down. You seem to have been a diligent student of it, too."

"What book? I don't remember," asked Madame Mirabel.

"Don't you remember my borrowing one from your shelf?" said Lancaster, smiling.

"Ah, I recollect now," she replied; "but I didn't see which you took. What was it?"

"It was Streich on Hypnotism," said Lancaster, glancing at her.

Madame Mirabel changed color. "Oh!" she said with assumed indifference. "You might have found something better worth reading than that, I think. By-the-bye, you promised to bring me a book from your library—I fancy you've forgotten that, haven't you?"

"Upon my word, I *had* forgotten it," answered Lancaster; "I am very sorry indeed. I should have brought it with me, no doubt, only that work on hypnotism put everything else out of my head. It awoke a train of very curious and rather painful speculation, and has roused in me a desire to give more attention to the subject than I have paid to it hitherto."

"No doubt, it must have considerable attractions for a medical man," remarked Madame Mirabel, outwardly calm. "It even interests me to a certain extent."

"Does it?" asked Lancaster. "Well, we must compare notes about it some day. Do you know, I came across a passage this morning which made a very deep impression on my mind. You remember how strongly poor Mirabel used to feel that his wonderful recovery, while it lasted, was due to some magnetic influence unconsciously exercised upon him by myself. You yourself once accused me, jestingly, of the same thing. I never believed in it; but I am free to confess that what Streich lays down upon this point has somewhat shaken my convictions. At least, his theory offers a curiously plausible explanation of the facts in this particular case—the continued improvement as long as I was in attendance, the sudden and rapid collapse as soon as my back was turned. There, I don't want to distress you. I know how painful all such thoughts must be to you. But put yourself in my place. A doctor who has lost a patient under mysterious circumstances *must* try and solve the enigma, if only in the interests of his profession.

And when there is another mystery connected with it—you know what I mean—the responsibility he labors under is increased a hundredfold."

"You have my fullest, my most earnest sympathy," said Madame Mirabel, with a tremendous effort. "How can I help you? You know you can command my assistance, in this and in all else."

"I know I can," replied Lancaster, with his rare smile, laying his hand on hers. For one moment it rested there, and he was in danger. Then a bell rang from up-stairs.

"Perhaps I had better see your mother at once," he said, rising.

Madame Mirabel rose too, and led the way into the sick-room. It may well be supposed that she had sent for Lancaster reluctantly. She did not wish him to see her mother, for more reasons than one. But Mrs. Jickling had had so very bad a night, and seemed so exceedingly unwell in the morning, that it was impossible to resist her urgent wish for medical assistance; indeed Madame Mirabel herself was a little alarmed, and thought it just as well that the doctor should be called in. She entered the room softly, and signed to Lancaster to follow.

Mrs. Jickling was sitting up in bed with her night-cap on, supported by several pillows. Her eyes were closed, and for the first moment or two she did not open them; which gave Lancaster time to look at her with his keen, professional glance before she was aware of his presence. His attention was immediately arrested. There was something strangely familiar to him in the worn, wrinkled face. Surely he must have seen her before; but where—that he could not remember. Then she opened her eyes and looked in her turn at him. A flash of recognition passed over her features at once, and she held out her hands to him in astonishment.

"My preserver!" cried the old woman, in her harsh voice. "Well; of all things, that I should find you here!"

Madame Mirabel was struck dumb. "What do you mean?" she managed to say at last, looking from one to the other.

"Why, I know this gentleman very well," replied Mrs. Jickling, with an air of considerable dignity. "He rescued me when I was in a bit o' difficulty in Lucerne—bein' swindled by a couple o' them thieves o' porters, goin' to the station with my luggage. Why, sir, if it 'adn't a been for you I doubt whether I sh'd a got away at all. And so you're Dr. Lancaster, as I've 'eard so much about! The way as things do come round is really beyond everything."

"I remember the circumstance perfectly," said Lancaster, smiling, "but of course I had no idea at the time who it was that I was privileged to assist. I thought your face was familiar to me the instant I saw it."

The next moment he was struck by the coincidence. Madame Mirabel's mother in Lucerne at the very time! Strange—why, she had never even told him, then, that she had a mother; never mentioned it when he was going to the very place where her mother was. Involuntarily he glanced at her. She was as white as rage and terror and deadly anxiety could make her. Gradually but relentlessly, she felt, discovery was approaching. Everything seemed to be combining against her. Fate, in its varied shapes, was bent upon her destruction. What malignant imp had arranged that fatal meeting between her mother and Dr. Lancaster? What unseen fury had brought her mother to that house, and thrown the two together a second time? What fatuity was it that had prompted her to leave that book about—the book of her unhalloved study—and had thrown it in the way of Lancaster? From all sides she seemed to see detection coming. She was being made herself the instrument of her own doom.

Still, she did not give up. The prize at stake was too great to be abandoned in view of the present *contretemps*, alarming as it was. As yet, at any rate, Lancaster had no suspicions, and she would take care that none should be suggested to his mind.

"It is really a very curious coincidence," she said, with a careless smile. "You are not strangers, then, it seems. It will be all the pleasanter for you, mother, to have a doctor whom you know—though we'll hope you'll not want one long. There's nothing much the matter with her, Dr. Lancaster, is there?"

These words aroused Lancaster from the reverie into which he had fallen. He came forward, felt Mrs. Jickling's pulse, took her temperature, and asked a question or two; then he said that there was nothing to be alarmed at, only that great care must be exercised in order to prevent complications. The fact was that he feared pneumonia, though there was no necessity for saying so. He wrote a prescription, gave a few directions as to diet, and then prepared to leave, saying that he would look in next day.

He looked very thoughtful as he went down-stairs, followed by Madame Mirabel. She, feverishly anxious to find out exactly the condition of his mind, drew him once more into the dining-room; but there was a reserve, an abstraction, in his manner which had

not been noticeable before, and this increased her uneasiness. He excused himself from prolonging his stay, on the score of patients to be visited; and when he had gone she again went up to her mother's room. But even here she found no comfort, for Mrs. Jickling had lapsed into taciturnity, and made very cold response to the unwonted advances of her daughter; whereupon Madame Mirabel, left to the torments of anxiety, and unable to bear her solitude any longer, arrayed herself in the richest walking-costume she possessed, and set out upon a round of calls.

CHAPTER XXV

"HAVE ALL HIS VENTURES FAILED?"

THE crash had come at last. For some days the uneasiness in financial circles had been growing; the bank rate went up, shares of all descriptions went down, capitalists began to draw in their horns, and everybody seemed to be waiting breathlessly for the impending thunder-storm. At last it broke. At three o'clock one afternoon the Colossal Joint Stock Bank suspended payment, and before five it was a foregone conclusion that the great house of Varley, Templeton & Co., India and Russia merchants, bill-discounters, and private bankers, would suspend too. One other eminent firm was talked about, and reported to be in difficulties; anxiety as to its chances of weathering the storm ran high, and for some hours its fate was undecided. Meanwhile the two big failures that had taken place—for next morning the stoppage of Varley's was announced—was bringing down smaller houses one after another. The City was, for the time being, demoralized. The wildest rumors passed from mouth to mouth—some favorable, some sinister. There were scarcely a hundred firms of standing who could feel sure of their own safety. No one knew what to expect; no one knew who might be the next to go, or what disastrous result the next failure might have upon himself. The ruin was already wide-spread enough, and few City men slept comfortably that night; but the trouble was not yet over. During the forenoon of the succeeding day the Capital and Discount Banking Corporation closed its doors, and the agony reached its climax.

Poor Mr. Palliser no sooner got wind of what was going on than he rushed up to town third-class, vowing that he was a ruined man and looking unutterable things. Nor did his visit bring him any comfort. The whole City, as he told his wife afterwards, was as hopelessly deranged as though there had been an earthquake. The air seemed full of the wildest and most alarming rumors, but not a tittle of solid practical information could he get. He went round, with a palpitating heart, to the various offices in the fort-

unes of which he was interested, and found some of them still open, to his momentary relief; but the few seconds of conversation he contrived to secure with the managers and secretaries were not calculated to reassure him. In two instances, indeed, he found the doors locked, with every appearance of having been locked for weeks. Last of all he repaired to the imposing, handsome, prosperous-looking mansion where his cherished Non-Intoxicating Liquor Association rented chambers. There he found no one but an athletic office-boy playing leap-frog with the stools, who told him that Mr. Jerningham had gone out of town on Monday, without leaving word how soon he would be back.

Meanwhile Mrs. Palliser, pale and agitated, had been pacing the drawing-room—that pretty drawing-room, of which she was so fond—in an agony of apprehension. Often and often during that dreadful day did the poor lady pray for fortitude, for resignation, for a spirit of composure and tranquillity; sometimes she prayed that things might not turn out so badly after all, and hoped against hope that ruin might be averted. Mrs. Palliser was of a rather more timid disposition than her husband, and whenever she saw that he was on the lookout for some new investments was wont to pray very earnestly that he might be “guided” in his choice—a petition which always seemed to have been satisfactorily answered as long as the eight, or the nine, or the ten per cent. dividends were paid; but what was she to think now? Of course it was a “dispensation”; everything of an unpleasant or alarming nature that happened to her was a dispensation, and dispensations were always mysterious. Even now she cherished a faint, lingering hope that God would interfere to prevent anything happening to the Non-Intoxicating Liquor Association, and just one or two other enterprises in which she knew her husband to be largely interested; but the main impression on her mind was that He would not “see fit” to do so. Oh, that they had been satisfied with a safe and modest four per cent. ! They would have been quite as rich in the long-run, for although the dividends would not have been so large, neither would the losses, nor so frequent; Mr. Palliser having already been made to smart somewhat severely on various occasions for his credulity and want of judgment. He was not a greedy man, and Mrs. Palliser did both her husband and herself injustice when, in her abasement and remorse, she groaned over the fate of “those that make haste to be rich”; he was simply an over-confident and flighty gentleman, with a weakness for the startling and

sensational, and impatient of the laborious and humdrum, who talked big and lived in an atmosphere of Spanish castles. His imagination, indeed, was of a perfervid nature altogether. According to his own account, everything that ever happened to him was wonderful and extraordinary in some way. The simplest occurrences assumed, in his eyes, monstrous and strange proportions, which were of course reproduced in their full magnitude when he told the story; and an anecdote related to him by some one else, and repeated by him to a third party, was sometimes scarcely recognizable. It was to this exuberance of speech that Mrs. Fullerton referred when she confided to Mrs. Chattering her disapproval of Mr. Palliser's "boastful" way, and which prompted the more cynical inquiry of an old gentleman who had known him in earlier years—"Well, and does Palliser tell as many *lies* as ever?"

Gerard was not at home just now. Of course he had not breathed a word to his parents about his offer to Madame Mirabel, and certainly neither of them had the faintest idea that anything of the sort had taken place. But very soon after his interview with her a great longing came over him for change of scene. He had no intention of setting out on a walking-tour abroad, as she had suggested—many considerations forbade such a step as that, at any rate for the present; a shorter trip, however, might not be a bad thing for him, and he consequently started off, two days after the idea entered his head, and was now putting up at the Plough Inn, near Alfoxden, on the Quantock Hills. The choice of venue proved a good one. The breezy slopes, commanding views of the Bristol Channel with the Welsh coast in the blue distance; the deep, still, beautiful green combes; the rocky shore, with its wealth of ammonites and curious row of "cathedral stalls," at Kilve; the fine old Court at Quantoxhead, claimed by the natives as the veritable Bluebeard's Castle; the rich, rolling meadows, the springing corn-fields, the clover-fields, the dim, quiet woods where the great Saint-John's-wort grows and the mysterious goatsucker sails and flaps about nocturnally, though not yet in their summer glory—all delighted Gerard, and exercised a wonderfully soothing influence upon his mind. He even enjoyed the rough, hard cider of the district, and made havoc in the flummery and rich cream that Mrs. Stroud, his black-eyed, portly hostess, set before him; little recking, alas! of the clouds, and the storms, and the shipwrecks in which he would soon have to bear a part—mildly won-

dering, indeed, to himself that the cheerful beauty of his surroundings and the country fare and Arcadian simplicity of his life should have eased his smart so strangely, even if the ease were but for a short time. Meanwhile his parents were in grievous straits; but it was good for him to be away, for he could not have helped them, and he was not destined to have many more hours of the calm, sunny cheerfulness of the Quantock Hills. To him they were always the Delectable Mountains of his life; the Hill Difficulty and the Valley of Humiliation were to come afterwards.

And he was favored by the weather, too. One hears a good deal about weather in England, but there is one property of English weather which seems absolutely constant and fixed, as the most unobservant must have noticed—it is always and invariably *exceptional*. Does it rain for a week without stopping? Ah, but that is exceptional, quite; it *never* rains like that in ordinary seasons. Is it cold? Well, it *is* cold, but that again is exceptional; properly it ought to be hot. Do you remark upon the warmth, and the fineness, and the sunshine? Exceptional again; it is years since we had such weather! Snow, hail, blizzards are perfect *lusus nature*, being still more exceptional than a glass at 85°, or fogs at midsummer; while even the winds of March and the showers of April are always “unusually” something, in spite of the regularity of their recurrence. Fortunately for Gerard, the exceptionality of the weather during his stay in Quantockia took a pleasant form, and helped him to be happy in spite of everything. His views of life grew calmer and brighter under the calm, bright sky. The chances of his love-suit seemed to gain in clearness and solidity as he wandered under the grand old beech-trees behind Alfoxden Cottage, or rambled up one of those glorious sylvan glades which lead one into the very heart of the Quantocks—a fairyland of moss-like turf and flowers and tinkling rivulets, under the greenwood tree. All the sympathies of his nature seemed to glow and widen under the rich, warm loveliness of the nature which lay around him, and for the time being he felt soothed and gladdened and at peace. Gerard never forgot the week he spent among the Quantocks. He often looked back upon it in the sterner life which was even then awaiting him—when he was tempted to feel that sorrow’s crown of sorrow was remembering happier things—when he was learning that hardest of all lessons, that only through sorrow and discipline and self-sacrifice can lasting joys be reached.

It was from his mother that roused him from his dream

of happiness. We can imagine what the poor lady wrote. Gerard, accustomed as he was to his parents' habit of exaggeration, felt a cold pain at his heart as he read the gushing, despairing sentences. Evidently there was no time to be lost. He packed his portmanteau without delay, snatched a hasty meal and drove straight off to Bridgewater. His great anxiety now was to be at home again, and find out for himself how matters actually stood.

Poor Mr. Palliser! He had come back from the city in great bewilderment and distress, unable to give any comfort to his wife. The whole world seemed to be tottering about his ears. Nothing, so far, had actually happened to him beyond what has been hinted at above; but during the two or three following days the extent of the catastrophe gradually came out. One after another his investments disappeared. Companies which had been rotten for months or years collapsed like a pricked balloon. A Guarantee & Loan Society in which he held seven thousand pounds' worth of shares was one of the first to go. The Olivian Real Estate & Mining Association, with a capital (on paper) of £5,000,000 in 50,000 shares of £100 each (£25 paid up), announced a heavy call upon the scrip-holders; and Mr. Palliser, alas! held no fewer than one hundred and thirty-five shares in that ill-omened enterprise. Compared with this, the disappearance of Mr. Jerningham and the premature demise of the Universal Warranted Non-Intoxicating Alcoholic Liquor Association were mere trifles; although the name of Marmaduke Palliser figured prominently upon the original list of shareholders, and he found himself liable for something like three times the amount of money that he had risked in the undertaking.

"I see nothing for it but the workhouse," proclaimed the unlucky gentleman, compressing his lips and glaring portentously round the room. "I'm a ruined man. It's hard upon us, at our time o' life—uncommon hard. Well, we've had our day, and now I suppose we must make room for some one else."

"But, Marmaduke, will there be nothing left?" asked his wife, weeping. "Surely we can save something out of the wreck. It's impossible that we can be penniless! I can't imagine it. I don't know what it's like to have literally no money and no home. It seems an impossible condition of things. Oh, if we could only wake up and find it all a dream!"

"Ah," said Mr. Palliser, grimly. "I dare say."

"But *shall* we be penniless, Marmaduke?" repeated his wife,

anxiously. "That is the terrible question. A mere pittance of an income, if it were only certain, would make all the difference. But ruin—destitution—beggary"—and here the poor lady broke down afresh, and failed to finish her sentence.

"Well, I can't say," replied Mr. Palliser with an effort. "It's not easy to know exactly how we shall stand until everything's settled up. One thing we may be sure of—that those who can pay will have to pay, and that to the uttermost farthing. It's the men of straw who'll escape best," said the poor man, with a touch of his former importance. "Those who've nothing to lose can't lose much, that's clear; whereas we—"

"Ah! How are we to live?" cried Mrs. Palliser in despair. "Oh, Marmaduke, what a blessing it is that your dear mother has been spared all this!"

"Yes," muttered her husband. "Poor old dear—she's well provided for, at any rate. And Gerard's safe enough, too. That's some consolation. By-the-way—it's about time you wrote to him, isn't it?"

"Oh, let the dear boy have his holiday," said Mrs. Palliser, wiping her eyes. "To-morrow evening will be soon enough. Oh, Marmaduke, I can live anywhere—in a common cottage, even—if only we have *something* to depend upon. If only we could find some tiny place in the country, somewhere in Wales, for instance, where we could get something for fifteen pounds a year, and live on the simplest food, I should be content. It's that that is so dreadful to me—the fear that we may have nothing. I don't mind the loss of fortune so much, or position—it's the dread of being absolutely penniless. I shall be in an agony until I know exactly how we stand."

Of course both these good people knew that they could never be reduced to starvation with an unmarried son possessing three hundred a year in his own right, besides a substantial sum of ready money. And yet both shrank from the idea of becoming either the guests or the pensioners of Gerard; it was repulsive and distasteful in the extreme. They almost felt as though they would have preferred that Gerard should have had nothing—except for his own sake; and so strong was their reluctance that Mr. Palliser had already begun to devise schemes of independence for himself, vowing that he would accept any situation, however humble, that would enable him to earn a salary.

"I'll take a clerkship in a country bank," he said, "if it turns

out that we have nothing. I don't mind what I do. I'll turn commercial traveller if there's nothing else—I believe I could cry wine and sell vinegar with the best of 'em. I don't know, either—I shouldn't wonder if there's a chance in the City, even, when all this hurly-burly's over. Whenever a big house fails there are always a lot of smaller ones cropping up—rising out of its ashes, so to speak—and things may be all the better now that the air's cleared—established on a sounder basis, as it were. Come, wife, don't let's look on the darkest side of the business till we need. Hope for the best, prepare for the worst, as poor old mother used to say. There's one consolation—it isn't *only* the rotten concerns that have gone. I may have been misled in some of my investments—that Olivian affair, for instance—but when we see grand old institutions like the Colossal Joint Stock Bank and Varley, Templeton & Co. succumbing to the times, one can't but feel we're in good company."

To this undeniable fact Mrs. Palliser gave a somewhat dolorous assent, not liking to dash her husband's consolation by pointing out that ruin was ruin, whether incurred in good company or not. She had her own views, too, about Mr. Palliser's fitness for a clerkship in a country bank, which she also abstained from expressing; she even went so far as to doubt, in her despondent mood, whether he would be able to obtain a situation at all, considering his age and inexperience of routine work. As for herself, she knew perfectly well that she could do nothing at all. In spite of the sprightliness and jauntiness which often characterized her manner, there was a constitutional indolence about Mrs. Palliser; she never really did anything, was never seen with a bit of needle-work in her hands, or taking part in any enterprise of the charitable or useful sort, but was given rather to sitting with her hands before her, sometimes reading a pretty religious book, and sometimes in the garden, admiring her lawns and flowers. Any sudden calamity, therefore, which would deprive her of this pleasant, drifting life was naturally very dreadful to her, and for a long time not even her wonted buoyancy of spirits asserted itself in her favor.

Gerard's return was a source of great though unspoken relief to both. He found them anxious and wretched enough, but calmer and somewhat more resigned than they had been a few days previously. Mr. Palliser made a clean breast of everything, rather exaggerating than minimizing the extent of his disasters; and Gerard listened with much external calmness, though no one could

have guessed the blank despair which now reigned within him. Not a word of lamentation or of disappointment escaped his lips, and his parents, who never laid any embargo upon the free expression of their own feelings, were astonished at his apparent callousness. He heard them to the end, and then said simply :

"The outlook is bad enough, no doubt; but until we see exactly how we stand of course there is no use in making projects for the future. At present it is impossible to say what the result will be. There may be a sum remaining that will be sufficient to provide an income—a very narrow one, of course; or, everything may have to go, even down to the very furniture. We can't settle anything till we are in possession of the balance-sheet, so to speak. Then we shall be able to see our way and make our arrangements accordingly."

"And what are we to do in the meantime?" ejaculated Mr. Palliser, feeling that Gerard was at least as able as himself to cope with the difficulties of the position.

"My advice would be to put your affairs into a lawyer's hands at once," said Gerard, promptly.

"Ah, do, Marmaduke!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, with more animation than she had shown since the trouble had come upon her. "I shall feel so much safer—it will be a sort of protection to us, you know. We're not very clever at managing our own affairs, I'm afraid, and a nice, sharp, honest lawyer might be able to prevent us from being taken advantage of by some of these wicked, dishonest companies, you know, and save something for us that we might lose ourselves. Yes, that is a good suggestion of dear Gerard's. I think it's the best thing that we could do."

"At any rate it can't do any harm," replied her husband. "I'll go to town to-morrow and see Harwood the first thing. Dishonest companies? My word, you may well call them that. I shouldn't wonder a bit, now, if their very suspension were some sort of swindle to make more money. I've heard of such things. A man told me once he knew of a great tallow-merchant who suddenly suspended payment, ruined any number of other people, went through the court and got whitewashed, and then started in business again a richer man than ever! Yes, I'll get Harwood to go into the whole affair—look up their books and their deeds of settlement and all—and, my word! have everything in black and white before we pay any one of 'em a farthing. Gerard, you're a shrewd lad after all, my boy, and I only wish I'd got you a good

appointment in the City years ago, where your capacities would have had some scope."

The good gentleman's inherent sanguineness now came once more to the front, and he began to feel more hopeful. Even Mrs. Palliser picked up a bit, and was able to eat a little dinner with a fair show of appetite; but Gerard was taciturn and depressed. He had small hopes of any favorable "balance-sheet," to use his own expression. He took a very serious view of the situation, and did not indulge himself in illusions, however plausible they might seem. But he was glad his father had adopted his advice so readily. It was important, in his eyes, that no time should be lost in discovering the actual position in which they stood, so that the future might be faced and arranged for. The suspense meanwhile was cruel, and he was anxious that it should be shortened as much as possible.

"Yes," said Mr. Palliser, pouring out his second glass of port, "I've been in straits before this, and managed to pull through somehow. Of course things are much more serious now—I don't deny that—but still, while there's life there's hope, and I don't intend to go down without a struggle of some sort to keep myself afloat. I always think, you know, that troubles and perplexities are like those bays and lochs on the west coast of Scotland—they look completely landlocked, and you'd be ready to swear that there couldn't possibly be a way out of 'em; and yet when you get on a little farther, why, there's the opening right in front of you! I shouldn't wonder a bit if that turned out to be the case now. Things look bad, but we can't say there's no way out of the difficulty until we come to try. And if the worst comes to the worst, I shall just put my shoulder to the wheel. I've worked before, and I don't see why I shouldn't work again. A man o' my experience in life ought to be able to do something, and be of use to somebody. And it isn't as though I didn't know anybody, either. I've been a City man all my life, in a sense. There are scores of influential men within five hundred yards' radius o' Capel Court who remember Palliser & Co., and who'd vie with each other—literally vie with each other—to give a hand to old Palliser's son for his father's sake. A man told me the other day that the City was being positively overrun with youngsters, and principals were getting sick of it. The great need now is for elderly men of solid character and practical knowledge of the world. Ah, all this upset will lead to great reforms in commercial life, depend upon it, and

not before they're wanted either. Things have been getting into a rotten condition for years past—insolvent firms being bolstered up by banks that held their paper, houses living from hand to mouth on their commission account, men of straw keeping themselves afloat by the pig-upon-pork dodge—bah! it wanted something like this to clear the air. Let us once pull through the present crisis, and we shall soon see better times."

Thus did Mr. Palliser console himself and his wife on the night of Gerard's return.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN ARROW SHOT AT A VENTURE

DR. LANCASTER made no allusion to the absorbing topic which now occupied his thoughts when next he visited Mrs. Jickling. Indeed he had no excuse for doing so. In the first place, curious as it was that Madame Mirabel should not have mentioned her mother's presence in Lucerne, there seemed nothing to connect the fact with the circumstances which were still perplexing him; nor did he feel himself justified, at that particular stage, in requesting an explanation from Madame Mirabel. In the second place, his patient demanded all the attention he could bestow upon her. She was really, though not dangerously, ill; ill enough to necessitate the greatest possible care, if pneumonia was to be averted, and as long as she was in that state he felt powerless to learn more. But that there was more to be learned he gradually became persuaded. Why, he could not tell. He did not for a moment suspect Madame Mirabel of knowing more than she cared to confess. To him she was still a bright, strong, beautiful woman, who had been a heroine among wives, and who was now betraying a tenderness of feeling towards himself. At the same time the coincidence, as she had said, was peculiar.

The change in his manner towards her, though perceptible for a day or two, was extremely slight. There was no coldness or formality; but there was just that faint suspicion of reserve which springs from the consciousness of a moot point between two otherwise confidential friends—a problem which a word from one of them would explain at once, but which is always carefully ignored. Lancaster felt just a little sore at this. Of course it was of no great consequence, either way; she had not been bound to tell him that her mother was at Lucerne, nor had he any right to expect it; still, she might have done so, just as she might now allude to the affair—only she never did. Apart from this, however, their relations continued as before. He brought her a book or two from his library, and had his tea with her in the drawing-room,

and, as he had himself expressed it, suffered himself to drift. It was very pleasant while it lasted. He was in the hands of one of the cleverest of women, who watched every play of his eye, and adapted herself to it unerringly. She always said the right word in the right place, did the thing most calculated to soothe or humor him as occasion for it arose, exercised that indescribable and consummate charm which only a woman who has the most perfect breeding at command possesses, and, in short, kept him well in hand. Any show of passion, any approach to demonstrativeness, any use of the more vulgar arts of "flirting," properly so called, would have been as impossible to her as disgusting to him. There was an instinctive refinement in her that no depravity could touch, and her influence over Lancaster was a magic of the very subtlest kind.

And Lancaster *did* drift. How far, indeed, he had drifted he did not suspect, until one afternoon, when the exchange of a look, the half-unconscious uttering of a monosyllable, revealed to him his position. And she saw it, and was glad. "He loves me," she said to herself. "He loves me, and now he knows it." The battle was virtually won; she had triumphed, the prize was within her grasp. It was nothing to her that he got up a moment afterwards and said he must be going. She was too wise to detain him. He went away, feeling that he no longer was his own. For weal or woe, it seemed to him, his fate was irrevocably sealed.

For an hour she never stirred. It cannot be denied that, ever since the recognition between Lancaster and Mrs. Jickling, she had been terribly anxious. But day had succeeded day, and the dreaded disclosure had not come. Lancaster's manner at first had been, perhaps, a trifle reserved, a trifle diffident; but he had made no further allusion to the point, and had apparently dismissed it from his mind. It was so, it must be so! And now he had gone too far ever to recede. Unconsciously he had betrayed his love; the moment after he knew that he had done so, and now, at last, they understood each other. The next step was to put the sea between her mother and themselves. Mrs. Jickling was now improving steadily; in a fortnight, at the outside, she should be safe in Heidelberg.

"I suppose it is to be," thought Lancaster that evening, as he slowly paced his study. "I can scarcely recede now. I wonder whether I would if I could? No—after all, a lonely life is never an ideal life. And, as she said, it is unwise to sacrifice one's whole

future to the past. Of course there are things in her I could wish a little different. That hard, uncompromising atheism is unlovely enough. It grates upon me to see her utter blindness to the spiritual side of life. I wonder whether there is any true sympathy between us?"

He paused in his walk, and a soft, far-away look came into his eyes. "O Edith, Edith!" he breathed. It was a dangerous moment for Julia. Then he threw himself into his reading-chair, and began slowly stuffing his pipe.

"What question should a man put to himself in such a position as mine?" he soliloquized, as the blue wreaths curled upward. "There must be some test which is infallible. Some men ask themselves, 'Can I live with her?' and if the answer is 'Yes' they consider the matter settled. But that won't do. The true inquiry should be 'Can I live without her?' and only if the answer is 'No' is it safe and right to marry. How is it, I wonder, with myself?"

Then his thoughts turned to Mrs. Jickling. "Certainly, Heidelberg is the best place for her," he muttered with a humorous smile. "What a strange mother for such a daughter! She looks as though she had had a hard life of it, poor old woman—poor old campaigner—must have lived by her wits, I should think, if those cunning eyes mean anything. I suppose she was handsome as a girl—her profile is not bad even now."

By a natural association his mind turned at this juncture to the old worry, the old puzzle, and here lapsed into a very brown-study indeed. The idea came across him that he ought not to marry Madame Mirabel until the mystery attending her late husband's death had been cleared up. There seemed no special reason why this was so, for no blame could possibly attach to either him or her; it was a feeling, an instinct, merely. Suddenly a great change came over his face—a look of excitement, the look of a man who has had an unexpected revelation, who has found a clew, to whom a thought has occurred which had never occurred to him before. He sprang up, passed his hand over his eyes, and began once more to pace the room. "My God!" he exclaimed. "How is it I never remembered that till now?"

It had just flashed upon him that he *had* told somebody of the projected Mattei conference at Lucerne; and that that somebody was Madame Mirabel. True, when he mentioned the receipt of the telegram to her the evening before he left, she looked perfectly vague and blank; said she had never heard of the matter at all,

and had no recollection of his having told her of it. He had been a little surprised at her lapse of memory, but never thought any more about it; it was a little curious, certainly, that it should have passed so completely from her mind, but no one can remember everything, and if she had forgotten she had forgotten. It was strange, however, that this incident should have remained so long and so completely out of his own thoughts.

"She was the only person to whom I ever said a word about it," he said, throwing himself back in his chair; "the only person. Of course there might have been somebody in Lucerne who knew about it. Why did she never mention the fact she had a mother staying there? God grant I may be on a false scent. What possible *reason* could she have?"

Unconsciously his hand fell upon the book which lay beside him. He opened it at the page that had arrested his attention before—the page disfigured with those long, thick, pencil-marks.

"... while in cases of actual malevolence, the power may be used for the illicit subjugation of the patient's will, and even for the extinction, instead of the resuscitation, of his vitality. In short, hypnotism may be employed as the instrument of..."

He threw the book from him with the nearest approach to an oath that had ever crossed his lips. "That way madness lies," he said aloud. "I'm making a bungle of the whole business. Evidently nature never intended me for a detective. I should like to lay the affair before some shrewd man whose mind has been trained in that direction—some man who would show me how absurdly wrong I am, and put his finger on the real clew. I'm all astray, and had better give it up."

Brave words, but his heart was sinking all the time. He knew that he could not give up the quest now—that it must be followed to the bitter end. And the prospect filled him with dismay. He seriously entertained the idea of running up to town in order to take a certain old chum of his into confidence, and ask him his opinion—the burden had suddenly grown so much heavier than it was before, and his friend, who was practised in criminal law, might relieve him of it. In the middle of his cogitations he was called out to see a child with croup, and he was glad of the interruption. The case occupied his attention for some hours, and it was nearly two when he returned. He felt healthily fatigued, and fell asleep as soon as he got into bed.

The next morning he arose refreshed in mind and body. He fancied he must have been morbid overnight. A new, fair, happy life was opening before him; why should he cloud his own prospects with conceits as horrible as they were absurd? The sun was shining, and the wind whistling merrily through the fir-trees on the moor. It was a golden day, and it had its effect on Lancaster. He felt degrees more hopeful, more buoyant, than on the previous evening.

But as the forenoon advanced the old train of thought rushed back, and it occurred to him that he would try once more for a solution. Anything was better than this uncertainty. A certain impulse came over him, and he yielded to it on the instant. Contrary as it was to his usual practice, he drove to Gorse Cottage about eleven o'clock instead of waiting till five. Madame Mirabel, not expecting him, was out, and he went straight up to Mrs. Jickling's room.

"Well, and how are you feeling to-day?" he said, taking a seat beside her. "I don't generally call in the morning, so perhaps I've taken you a little unawares. You're looking pretty well, it seems to me."

"Aye, aye, doctor, you certainly 'ave pulled me through wonderful," replied Mrs. Jickling, settling the shawl upon her shoulders. "I thought I was in for a bad time of it. I'm in hopes of gettin' out a bit before long."

"Yes, I think you've had an escape," said Lancaster. "It might very easily have settled upon your lungs, and then things might have become serious. As it is, you'll do very well. Your constitution was in your favor."

"I was always pretty wiry," remarked Mrs. Jickling, with a complacent air. "I'm expecting to go abroad before long, as I dare say Julia's told you. It's a fine place, Heidelberg, I'm thinkin'?"

"A charming town," said Lancaster. "Yes, I should think you'd be very comfortable there. You've been abroad before, you know, so continental life won't be strange to you. But of course Heidelberg is very different from Lucerne."

Mrs. Jickling made no reply to this. She was looking a little absent, as though her thoughts were wandering. In a moment or two she said:

"Oh, I shall do well enough. I come of a hearty stock, and can put up wi' most things. But I tell you what, doctor—I'm not over

and above easy about Julia. Ha'n't you *noticed* anything about her, this last week or two?"

"In what way?" inquired Lancaster, rather startled.

"Well, *you* know she 'ad a faintin' fit not so very long ago," replied Mrs. Jickling, nodding her head mysteriously. "*I* heard all about it, though she was so close. And then look at 'er face! She's that pale and thin you'd think she was goin' into a decline; and them dark hollers under 'er eyes, they tells a tale, too—though what that tale may be *I* don't know. But there's something wrong with her, doctor. She ain't what she used to be. I've thought now and again as there must be something on her mind. She don't eat enough not to keep a mouse alive, and as for sleeping—well, what makes 'er go wanderin' about the 'ouse at night, when folks ought to be in their honest beds? That's what *I* want to know. No, doctor, you may say what you like, but a mother's not to be deceived. Julia's ill, and nothing 'll make me believe she ain't. There's something desperate wrong with her, that's *my* belief, and now, as I'm as good as off your hands, I wish you'd just look after her a bit."

Lancaster knitted his brows. "Certainly, I've noticed indications of weakness," he said, with professional reserve; "a want of tone, in fact. But I have no reason to suppose that there is any deep-seated mischief. Her spirits appear to me excellent, which is always a good sign. As for the restlessness at night—that, of course, I did not know. I am sorry to hear of it. But I don't think she has anything on her mind. What can she have? Of course she has been through a great deal during the last six months or so—we all know that. No—I'm in hopes that she has many very happy years before her. At any rate, there's one thing in her favor—she seems to have inherited your own excellent constitution."

And yet Mrs. Jickling's words had rendered Lancaster vaguely uneasy. Why should Madame Mirabel wander about the house at night? What made her mother think she must have something on her mind? Again his thoughts began to set in the direction he was most anxious to avoid. Again the torturing suspicion, the vague, horrible uncertainty, began to make itself felt. And he was not the man to shrink from pain, if the pain were necessary. There was an opportunity for him, here and now, to discover a part of the truth.

"Well, just you keep an eye on her," said Mrs. Jickling, shortly.

Then Lancaster braced himself to speak. "Wasn't it very curious," he said, "that we should have met so casually at Lucerne, without either of us knowing who the other was?"

The suddenness of the attack took Mrs. Jickling off her guard. She started visibly at the change of subject, administered a feeble and quite unnecessary poke to the fire, and muttered an almost inarticulate assent.

"Still more curious," pursued the doctor, "that Madame Mirabel, when I conversed freely with her just before I left, should never have told me that she had a mother staying there?"

"I never did understand Julia," said Mrs. Jickling, feeling vaguely uncomfortable.

"I suppose you went to Switzerland for change of air," continued Lancaster, fixing his dark eyes on the old woman's face. "It's a charming place, and I enjoyed my stay there very much. I should have enjoyed it still more, had it not been that I found myself confronted with a great difficulty — an insoluble puzzle — that detracted very considerably from my pleasure."

"Yes?" murmured Mrs. Jickling, almost inaudibly.

"It was connected with a telegram," said Lancaster, bringing out the words with unusual distinctness. "I went there in consequence of a telegram, purporting to come from a friend of mine named Dr. Bretschneider, and urging me to meet him there, without delay. I started at once, and arrived on a Monday afternoon — the afternoon, in fact, when you and I happened to fall in with each other. Judge, then, of my astonishment, when I found that Dr. Bretschneider was not in Lucerne at all, and had not been there for a month!"

"You don't say," was all that the old woman managed to gasp out.

"The telegram was a forgery," resumed Lancaster with his sternest air, "and the sender of it is liable, if ever he is discovered, to a term of penal servitude. I found that I had been decoyed from home, by some wicked and malicious person, for purposes that I do not pretend to fathom. But the result—shall I tell you what the result was, Mrs. Jickling? Nothing less than the death of your poor son-in-law, Gaston Mirabel!"

Mrs. Jickling's mouth and eyes were open, and her breath came quick and short; but she answered never a word.

"Yes, Mirabel was doing well when I left," said Lancaster in a quieter tone, "and if I had stayed with him I believe he would

never have died. The exact cause of his death is still a mystery to me, and it is unnecessary for me to say any more about it. Let it suffice that if I had not been made the victim of this cruel hoax, or conspiracy, or fraud, I could have prevented it, and he would in all probability have been alive to-day. You see, then," he added, "what terrible associations the very name of Lucerne has for me. I can never think of it without a shudder; and I will never rest until I have discovered the perpetrator of the deed."

So far, Lancaster had been "going it blind." He had no evidence worth the name for connecting Mrs. Jickling with the conspiracy. He had no right to accuse her, nor could he imagine what possible motive there could have been for the cruel fraud which had cost Mirabel his life, on the supposition that these women had had a hand in it. There were only three facts to go upon—the presence of Mrs. Jickling in Lucerne at the very time the telegram was sent, the concealment of this on the part of Madame Mirabel, and Madame Mirabel's previous and exclusive knowledge of the proposed conference; and after all, what did they amount to when weighed against the enormous improbabilities of the conclusion they suggested? But now, the shrinking, terrified expression on the face of the old woman startled him, and went far towards confirming him in his suspicions. He had drawn his bow at a venture, trusting he might hit nothing; but lo! the arrow seemed quivering in the very bull's-eye. It was only at the expense of a tremendous effort that he succeeded in suppressing the horror he now felt. He kept silence for some seconds, his eyes fixed on the cowering figure before him. Then he said, in a voice he scarcely recognized as his own:

"How much do you know about this business, Mrs. Jickling?"

"Don't ask me!" cried the old woman, throwing up her hands with a despairing wail. "Oh, to think of it—to think of it! And I that blind and innocent—how should I 'ave guessed? I don't know nothin', doctor—I can't tell you nothin'. What do you mean by talkin' to me like this?"

Lancaster turned pale to the very lips.

"If you know nothing of it, I cannot see why you should distress yourself about it," he replied, with great coldness. "Come, be frank with me. You sent that telegram, did you not?"

She only groaned.

"And I am willing to believe you did so ignorantly," continued Lancaster. "Of course, somebody must have employed you, I

presume. I cannot imagine that, knowing nothing of me or of my circumstances, you can have acted independently in the affair. In God's name tell me the whole story, as far as you know it yourself. It is the only reparation you can make."

Dead silence. She neither moved nor spoke. Lancaster waited for a denial, but none came. Then he rose slowly, and began to draw on his gloves.

"This is very terrible," he said, standing erect before her. "You have betrayed yourself; you have not denied the charge; you have confirmed my worst suspicions. Still, I may even now be doing you injustice. Answer me—speak to me—tell me I am wrong. There is still a chance for you."

There was no reply. She only wrung her withered hands together and bit her lips convulsively. Lancaster had no longer any room for doubt.

"If I may advise you, Mrs. Jickling, you will say nothing of all this to Madame Mirabel," he said, taking up his hat. "This is in your own interest as well as hers." Then he passed out of the room without further leave-taking, looking like a man under the influence of some appalling dream.

Dr. Charlton lived about two miles off, and Lancaster, glancing at his watch, calculated that he would be just in time to catch him before lunch. The two men were not on very confidential terms. Charlton was inferior to Lancaster in more ways than one; a respectable country practitioner, but scarcely a man to be trusted alone in any case requiring exceptional skill or science. Just now, however, it was he and he alone who could furnish Lancaster with the information that he required.

He was in his small consulting-room, washing his hands with his coat off, when Lancaster was shown in. Something in the face of the latter arrested his attention, and he wondered for a moment whether Lancaster had some interesting case in hand in which his assistance was to be asked for. He looked quickly up, and gave his brother medico a welcome in which professional cordiality was diplomatically tempered with an unmistakable show of deference. Dr. Lancaster was a "cut above him," and he knew it.

"Charlton," said Lancaster, as soon as they were both seated, "I've come to ask your help in a matter which I had hoped it would not be necessary to bother you about again. I refer to the case of Mirabel. I know you've had trouble enough in connection with it, and I really feel I owe you an apology for reopening the subject;

but there is no help for it. Just let me go over your memoranda again, will you? I have lately stumbled upon something which I think may throw an entirely new light upon the symptoms, and I want to check your diagnosis by the theories that I've come across."

The other looked surprised, but was all compliance. "Why certainly, Dr. Lancaster," he said, selecting a manuscript book and turning over its pages. "A very sad case that was—very sad indeed. There wasn't anything to be done, you know. You couldn't have done anything yourself if you'd been here. Ah—here it is. It begins just there. You must know it as well as I do by this time, I should think."

"Thank you very much," replied Lancaster, taking the book, and studying the page intently. "Yes, yes—as you say, I know it all pretty well by heart. But I want to apply a test to it that I was not in a position to do before." He drew a sheet of paper from his pocket, closely written. It was a transcript from a certain chapter of Streich's *Hypnotism*, and dealt with the symptoms resulting from the employment of the hypnotic power to destroy, instead of to increase, vitality. He compared the two for some time, frowning darkly. Then he said:

"Thanks. And now just answer me one or two questions that had not suggested themselves to me when we last conferred together."

Charlton, greatly wondering, at once complied. Their colloquy lasted half an hour, and left him considerably puzzled; he could not for the life of him imagine what Lancaster was driving at. Just as he was going away the latter said:

"And you're perfectly sure that his wife was the only person, in the house or out of it, who had any access to Mirabel?"

"As sure as I can be of anything," replied Charlton. "The servants were never allowed to go near him towards the end. Young Palliser saw him once or twice, I believe, but only for a few moments. She was with him all the time, and did everything for him."

Lancaster did not linger. He was anxious to be alone, and to go over the whole thing in his own mind. Charlton's replies and notes were not such as could be held to constitute the clear proof required, independent of other circumstances; but they afforded grounds for presumptions of the very gravest nature, and coincided with much that could scarcely be otherwise accounted for.

He spent the afternoon in visiting patients, and the occupation

was beneficial to him, as it afforded that temporary change in the direction of his thoughts that he needed after the emotions of the morning ; but his mind was only half in the work. He was in a suppressed fever of excitement all the time. He pictured to himself the calm, pale, beautiful face of the woman who had conquered him—so strong, so full of intellect, yet softened with such exquisite gleams of tenderness—and wondered what lay beneath it. What was she, in her real self ? Had she a soul, a heart, a capacity for unselfish love, or was she only a beautiful vampire ? Would this terrible cloud of suspicion pass away and leave them basking in the pure sunlight of perfect confidence, or were they to be separated at once, irrevocably, and forever ? And if she *were* guilty, what was he to do ? His whole soul shrank from the problems he saw presenting themselves for his solution, and for some hours he found himself sinking into the very depths of moral cowardice. Still, she had only conquered him ; she had not enslaved him. He was still in possession of his faculties, his judgment, his moral sense. There should be no haste, no premature accusation. He would give her the fullest and freest opportunities for whatever explanations she might have to offer—would hear her own story if only she could be induced to tell it, and interpret everything in her favor that could be so interpreted. His worst fears might be justified, and complete acquittal, it seemed, there could not possibly be. But the time for hesitancy was over. The woman must be put to the proof, and he and she together would have to abide by the result.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE AWAKENING OF GERARD

THE abject condition of remorse, terror, and despair into which Mrs. Jickling sank as the door closed behind Dr. Lancaster may be better imagined than described. At the time she consented to do what her daughter required of her for the sake of a holiday in Switzerland she had troubled her head very little about the nature of the undertaking. It was clear to her, of course, that "Julia was up to something," and that was all she knew or cared to know; Julia, she had argued, was old enough and shrewd enough to be well aware what she was about, and as for herself—well, she was going to have a lovely time, and play the lady with the best of them. In fact, she soon ceased to think anything about it at all, and it was only when she was confronted, months after the occurrence, with the very man to whom the false message had been sent, that she began to feel uneasy and inquisitive. But what was that uneasiness when compared to the horror which overwhelmed her now? She had been nothing less than an accomplice in a crime for which she might yet stand in the dock. She had suffered herself to be the instrument of a deed that had resulted in the death of her own son-in-law. Had he been murdered? Had Julia wanted him to die? Why had she committed a fraud in order to separate him from his doctor? Of course she herself had not known that Lancaster was a doctor at all. To her the name was nothing but a word in the telegram. And there was nothing in the telegram itself to suggest that the slightest harm was intended to anybody, least of all to Mirabel, the idea of whose connection with the matter never entered her head. Now, for the first time, she saw the terribleness of her act, and the terribleness of her position, and the vision that rose before her was a very ghastly one.

She was a bad old woman, but she was not wholly bad. She was unscrupulous enough up to a certain point, but the idea of actual crime was something quite beyond her calculations, and she

was honestly appalled at the wickedness at which she had connived. And now, what was she to do? Here she felt entirely at sea. At one moment it seemed to her that her best course was to make a clean breast of her detection to Julia, and urge the instant flight of both. The next moment she shrank in terror from making the avowal; she feared the wrath of Julia as a frightened child fears that of a despotic school-master, or an offending hound the whip; she dared not brave her fury. But, with this, arose a passion of fierce anger against the woman who had so abused her innocence. She, at any rate, had sinned unwittingly; but she had been made a cat's-paw, and had incurred most serious guilt; by what right had Julia thus involved her in her own destruction? Alas, her hands were tied, for apart from Julia she had no means of subsistence, and grievously as Julia had behaved to her she might lose all by quarrelling with her now; and then there would be no gay life in Heidelberg, no more dainty dinners or black velvet gowns—nothing but the hardest and most sordid penury, a pittance not sufficient to keep her body and her soul together, even if they escaped the dock! A thousand times the miserable old woman cursed and bemoaned her folly. She had been the means of procuring Gaston's death, and the penalty was now to be exacted.

It may well be supposed that Madame Mirabel, when she came in half an hour later, did not find her mother in a particularly cordial or expansive mood. In fact, her manners were extremely dry, and her aspect generally morose; which Madame Mirabel, being accustomed to the old woman's somewhat uncertain temper, and not caring whether she was cross or not, paid little or no attention to. She was surprised, however, to hear that Dr. Lancaster had already been, as his habit was to pay visits in the afternoon; but heard with some complacency that his opinion of the patient was distinctly favorable, and that he had advised as early a removal to Heidelberg as could conveniently be arranged. It will be seen that Mrs. Jickling's version of what the doctor had said was somewhat over-colored; but in her desperate anxiety to put the seas between herself and the man she had so deeply offended and deceived she did not hesitate for a moment to distort the truth. She felt that if once she was out of England the chances of Julia knowing the part she had played in enlightening Lancaster would be materially diminished; her own safety, too, would be to some extent insured; while Julia was quite clever enough

to deal with any complications that might threaten her without the assistance of any one. Of her daughter's object throughout all—the prize on which she had staked so much—she knew and she guessed nothing.

That evening Madame Mirabel wrote to the Pension Scheibler at Heidelberg and said that Mrs. Jickling thought of starting within a week at the outside. Her mother, she added, was just recovering from severe indisposition, and would require a little extra care and attention for some time; the day of her departure would be communicated as soon as possible, in order that everything might be in readiness on her arrival. In this, it will be understood, Madame Mirabel was acting in perfectly good faith. She had no reason to doubt that Lancaster had really authorized her mother's almost immediate removal, and the satisfaction which Mrs. Jickling expressed on hearing that the *lettré* had been written was no less than her own in being in a position to write it. Her happiness was now approaching fast. Her last interview with Lancaster had been virtually decisive; the next could have only one result.

And yet for three days Lancaster never came. It was curious; she wondered a little how it was, and could only suppose that he was unusually busy. There was nothing, however, to make her feel uneasy. The only danger she had ever really feared had come and gone, and it was since then that her relations with Lancaster had become so tender and so close. No, she feared nothing, suspected nothing. Mrs. Jickling had kept her own counsel well, and Madame Mirabel walked on air.

It was about a fortnight after the crisis in the City that, as Lancaster was sitting in his consulting-room, he was surprised by a visit from Gerard. The doctor was just then in the very depth of his trouble and perplexity—unable to make up his mind what to do, distressed by the weight of responsibility which his overwhelming suspicions had laid upon him, and crushed under the sense of blended abhorrence and disappointment. He looked sharply up as Gerard was announced, and his trained glance at once recognized the presence of "something wrong" in the lad's face. Here was somebody who was in trouble as well as himself. Even if one's own sorrows are incurable, one may always do something to alleviate those of others.

"Sit down, Gerard," he said, rising with his kindest smile. "I have scarcely seen you for weeks, and I'm very glad to see you now. How are you, and how is everybody at home?"

Gerard responded to the other's greeting somewhat absently. "I'm—we're—pretty well, I think, thanks," he said, taking the seat that Lancaster offered him. "Of course one can't expect to be very cheerful, under the circumstances."

"Ah!" breathed Lancaster, sympathizingly. "I did hear something—but hoped that reports were exaggerated. Are things really so very bad?"

"Yes, they are—very bad," said Gerard. "In fact, I've come—"

"Have a whiskey-and-seltzer," interrupted the doctor, jumping up. "You're looking as white as a ghost. Do you like a pipe or a cigar best? A pipe—so do I. There's the baccy, and there are the matches. Well now, let's hear. Things are seldom so bad but what they might be worse."

• He soon provided Gerard with a big tumbler of the sparkling stimulant, and took a smaller one himself. Gerard drank two or three gulps eagerly, and lighted his pipe, smoking on for a few minutes in silence. Lancaster said nothing, wishing to let him take all the time he wanted. At last he resumed his statement.

"The fact is, Lancaster, that there has been a general burst-up. It's been threatening for months, and now it has come. My mother wrote to me when I was in Somersetshire, telling me of it. Of course I returned at once, and found them all at loose ends, so to speak. They hadn't a notion how they stood, and were full of the very vaguest plans. I suggested to my father that the sooner he put his affairs into the hands of his lawyer the better. Well, he did so. The whole thing has been properly goné into, and the result is that, as far as we can see, we shall be very lucky if we save the furniture."

"Is that so really?" exclaimed Lancaster in dismay.

"That is the simple fact," replied Gerard, "and we have to face it. Of course it's a tremendous blow. They were hoping there'd still be something left—some narrow income, on which they could manage to scrape along. But there's nothing—absolutely nothing. It's hard on all of us, I tell you."

"But surely your grandmother—" began Lancaster.

"I'm coming to that," said Gerard, sipping his liquor and putting down the glass. "Just now my father is as full of projects as he can be. He's been writing letters all the morning, trying to get some situation or other. He says he'll take anything that's offered—a clerkship at a hundred and fifty pounds a year, even, if he can't get anything better, though he hopes for a great deal

more than that. You know how sanguine he is. He positively believes he'll be overwhelmed with offers, and be able to pick and choose. Well, you know, I don't. I don't believe anything of the sort. I don't believe, myself, he'll get any offer at all. He knows nothing whatever of routine work, and it's difficult to see what use he'd be to any one—except to travel about the country puffing a patent corn-destroyer, or bread pills for rejuvenating old women, or some such rot. He might do well at that, because he'd believe in it so thoroughly himself."

Lancaster laughed slightly, puffing up his pipe.

"Why, only this morning he applied for the agency of some concern or other for extracting quicksilver from mangold-wurzels," pursued Gerard, "and if he had his money back to-morrow I believe he'd put a lot of it into that very swindle. The truth is, Lancaster, he has no more judgment than a child in such matters, and the less he has to do with business the better. In the meantime, however, something must be done."

The doctor glanced curiously at Gerard, and made no answer.

"You know," he resumed, "that when my grandmother died she left me all her money. There's about eight thousand pounds, I believe, invested in good mortgages at four per cent., besides several hundreds lying loose. At one time, when it looked as though my father's liabilities would prove heavier than the amount of his assets, it occurred to me to come to the rescue with this sum. But then where would have been the good? I shouldn't have benefited *him* one bit; everything would have been sacrificed, and none of us a penny the better. I have fully made up my mind not to spend a stiver in liquidating his affairs; I see no reason why I should. If he can't pay all he owes, he can't, and so much the worse for his creditors. But I entirely fail to see why I should sacrifice a single penny to help *them*."

"Certainly not," assented Lancaster, nodding.

"Therefore," continued Gerard, "and for other reasons which will no doubt occur to you, I don't intend to disturb the mortgages. The money is safe now, whereas if I were ever to let my poor father get hold of it there'd soon be little enough left—he'd give it away to the first man in the street who asked him for it. My plan, then, is this—to let them live on the interest; and I want you—I myself being absent—to accept my power of attorney, receive the interest as it falls due, and pay it over to them every quarter."

Lancaster had been waiting rather curiously to know what all this was to lead to. He now heard Gerard's proposal with unqualified approval and satisfaction, though he abstained from saying so at once. "There's sterling metal in the lad after all," he thought to himself, "and he's far from being a fool, too." But he only answered:

"Let's hear a little more first, Gerard. What need will there be for an attorney? Where will you be yourself?"

"Well," replied the lad slowly, "that is a matter on which I am going to ask your help. It won't do for the old people and me to live together under our new circumstances. It won't do for them to feel that they're my guests, so to speak; it would embitter their whole lives. You see I should be really boss of the whole show, and have a right to order everything according to my own ideas; and the situation would be impossible, after what they've been accustomed to. The only thing for me is to make myself scarce, and I intend to do it."

Lancaster was much moved. "It seems to me that you will be a greater sufferer by your father's ruin than he'll be himself," he said gently.

"That is inevitable," replied Gerard, with a slight smile. "Of course the whole vision of my future life has collapsed. I had formed plans of usefulness and pleasure which are now out of the question. It's difficult to realize this sometimes—difficult to reconcile myself to it. But it has to be done, and there's no use maundering. What I want to know, then, is this—Can you get me a position on that Leper Settlement in Saghalien?"

"Saghalien!" shouted Lancaster, aghast. "Are you serious, man? Do you know what you are thinking of?"

"I am perfectly serious," said Gerard. "I mean that Secular Mission you were telling us about, you remember. I shan't want any pay. I shall have a little ready money, and I dare say the odd £20 over the three hundred will suffice for my necessities—they'll be able to spare me that. Don't make any difficulties, please; there'll be difficulty enough with my mother as it is, and what I want now is help."

"I'm not at all sure that I *shall* help you," said the doctor with a thoughtful frown. "I don't believe it would be right. Of course you're your own master, and can shape your own course—but what makes you think of Saghalien? No, Gerard, think better of it. Think of the isolation, the dreariness, the risks—for there are

risks, you know—why, it may involve the upset of your whole life! For God's sake don't act rashly. You may have the most serious cause to regret it. And there's no necessity for it either. A fellow with a University education and something to stand by in the meantime—for it isn't as if you were destitute—can easily find good work to do in England. Why should you sacrifice yourself on the spur of the moment for such a fad as this?"

"You didn't call it a fad when you were telling us about it that day," replied Gerard.

"But it's such a terrible renunciation of everything!" exclaimed Lancaster, passing by the thrust in his excitement.

"No!" said Gerard, rising from his seat. "It hasn't even *that* merit. If I had decided upon taking this step when everything was prosperous—when my fortune was my own, and prospects of happiness in other directions not entirely unfavorable perhaps—*then* there might have been renunciation. Then there might have been some moral value in my action. But I didn't do so. I cherished plans and hopes that, whether useful to others or not, at any rate were pleasant to myself. It is only when I find myself stripped of everything, when I've nothing left to renounce, that I decide upon what you call renunciation. So you see I haven't even the consolation of self-approval. Come, Lancaster, don't make it harder for me than it is. My mind is quite made up, and if you won't help me I shall have to look out for somebody who will."

For some minutes Lancaster made no reply. The proposed sacrifice of this young lad seemed to him too cruel; he could not make up his mind to have part or lot in it. Besides, there were the parents to be considered. Was he justified, he asked himself, in helping to deprive them of their only son? Was it right, that he should lend his aid to a scheme for separating a family which had just undergone almost total ruin? His whole soul rebelled against it. He agreed with Gerard that there might be inconveniences attending their continued residence under the same roof; but the Leper Settlement at Saghalien!—it was horrible to think of, besides being so entirely unnecessary. In Gerard's present mood, however, it would not do to thwart him, and the doctor came to the conclusion that he would temporize.

"Well, Gerard," he said at last, "at any rate I won't refuse. It's no use attempting to dissuade you—I see that very well; I only stipulate for time. There's no hurry. The Mission won't be starting for a month yet. In the meanwhile, think the whole mat-

ter over very carefully. You fancy you've done so already, I know; but one can't consider a thing of this sort too much before deciding definitely. There are your parents to be dealt with, you know. It certainly would not be your duty to take this step without consulting them. It's all very well to go and help the lepers; but how if you can't do that without half breaking your mother's heart?"

"I don't think there's any fear of that," said Gerard, reflectively. "My mother's feelings are quick and sharp—they don't go very deep down, I fancy. I know exactly how she'll take it. She'll cry out that she never heard of such a thing since she was born, and that I must be mad to think of it; and then she'll begin to ask all sorts of questions about it, and finish up by wanting to know how soon I'm going to start. Of course they won't like my going, and no doubt they'll oppose it just at first; but in a day or two they'll be quite reconciled to it. Meantime I shall be looking out for a house for them, and that will take off their attention, you know. I'm sure I may count upon you to look after them when I'm away."

His voice trembled ever so little as he said this. It all meant so much more to him than Lancaster imagined. There was an even bitterer drop in his cup of renunciation than the mere sacrifice of fortune, or abandonment of country, or loss of the woman he loved—for of course he never dreamed of persisting in his love-suit now that he had no income for himself. The frequency of Lancaster's visits to Gorse Cottage had not passed unnoticed in the neighborhood, and Gerard was aware of it. The old, vague jealousy once more sprang up, and he thought he saw in Lancaster the favored rival who would ultimately reap the harvest of high happiness into which he had put his own sickle. It was only one pang more; but still it made him wince.

"That I promise you," said Lancaster.

Neither spoke for some minutes after this. At last Gerard said—yielding to an uncontrollable impulse—

"Going away is never so disagreeable in itself; it's the leave-taking that I bar."

Lancaster looked surprised. "You're not going to disappear all of a sudden, I hope, without saying good-bye to anybody, are you?" he said, with the slightest possible laugh.

"There are not many people to say good-bye to," replied Gerard, evasively. "If I leave anybody out, you must make my

adieux for me." Then he added, as a flush passed over his face, "You see Madame Mirabel pretty constantly, don't you?"

Lancaster started, but preserved his nonchalant air. "Of late I've seen a good deal of her," he said. "Mrs. Jickling has been in my hands, and I've had to go there rather often. But she's getting all right now, and I hear that she'll soon be going to the Continent to settle there."

Gerard did not look particularly interested in Mrs. Jickling's plans. "Because," he resumed, "if I should not be able to say good-bye to her in person, you might perhaps be kind enough to say all that is necessary for me—that's all."

"But why shouldn't you go and see her yourself?" asked Lancaster.

"For reasons which—she will herself appreciate," said Gerard, turning pink, and averting his eyes from his friend's.

Dr. Lancaster was thunderstruck. He had had no conception that there had been any feeling whatever between these two, or on either side—and the revelation was an immense astonishment to him. "Is that so, really?" he uttered almost to himself.

"I never intended to breathe a word of this to anybody," said Gerard, in a low tone. "I hate talking about my own affairs—as a rule. But now that I'm going away there's no particular reason for concealment—above all, from you. Of course I shall never see her again."

"Then it's harder for you than I thought," said the doctor, tenderly. "I am very, very sorry. And yet there may come a day when even you will have cause to be thankful for your disappointment. Believe me, Gerard—and I know what I'm talking of—things are infinitely better as they are."

"I can understand your saying so, of course," said Gerard, with a touch of bitterness.

Lancaster looked at him in surprise. "What do you mean?" he asked, curiously.

"I dare say this sort of gossip doesn't reach you," returned Gerard, "but it exists for all that. Numbers of people here believe—"

"Believe what?" demanded Lancaster as the other paused.

"I suppose you can guess," answered Gerard. "That you and Madame Mirabel are engaged."

"Do you mean to tell me that seriously?" asked Lancaster, with some excitement.

"I do indeed," replied Gerard. "I believe that Mrs. Chattering has already fixed the wedding-day, if that's anything to the purpose."

"Mrs. Chattering!" cried Lancaster, in a tone of scorn.

"I hope you're not annoyed at my having mentioned it?" asked Gerard.

"Not in the very least," replied the other, recovering himself quickly. "I'm annoyed that such rumors should exist, of course; but not in the least with you. On the contrary, I am glad you've told me. It's just as well to know what is being said about one. Mrs. Chattering, forsooth!"

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and took a clean one from the rack. Gerard watched him languidly, and wondered whether he would say more.

"It is not true, Gerard," he said at last, when he had got his fresh pipe well alight—"it is not true, and I give you my authority to deny it. I am not engaged to Madame Mirabel, and there is no likelihood at the present moment that I ever shall be."

Gerard drew a deep breath. "Well," he said, with the glimmer of a smile, "I should certainly never have believed it on the authority of Mrs. Chattering."

"I should hope not," returned Lancaster.

The way in which Madame Mirabel's name had been brought into the conversation had given him an unpleasant twinge. He was deeply sorry that Gerard should have been fascinated by her; and yet would there not have been cause for far more serious regret had she met his advances favorably? His own duty then would have been so much more difficult, so infinitely more painful, than it was now—supposing that his suspicions were confirmed. He had managed to force this trouble of his into the background while Gerard was talking about the strange future he had chosen for himself, but now it all came back upon him. He remembered the terrible ordeal which lay before him, and he remembered it with a shudder.

"Well," said Gerard, "I must be going back now. Thank you ever so much for promising to look after the old people—though I hope and believe it won't be any trouble to you. You'll only have to pay them their interest every quarter, you know. And I rely upon your help as regards myself."

Lancaster ratified his promises in due form, and shook the lad's hand with something more than his usual cordiality. Gerard went

away, it must be confessed, with his heart considerably lightened. It was something to know that there was nothing between Madame Mirabel and Lancaster, although it made no practical difference to him; and he felt satisfied that his parents' future was now definitely provided for. It only remained now for him to efface himself; and self-effacement is not so difficult, after all, when one has virtually lost everything that makes a selfish life worth living.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ENDING OF A DAY

Now Madame Mirabel, who had the true scientifically-observant nature, had remarked that the more her schemes prospered with regard to Lancaster, the more she suffered from those strange horrors which for some months past had been pressing upon her so intolerably. As long as she was actually in his presence, and could hear his voice, and look confidently into his dark, full, tender eyes, she feared nothing; there was something in his proximity which armed her against all terrors, and permitted her to defy her impalpable and relentless foe. But she knew that the price would be exacted as soon as she was once more alone. Then it was that the vague, horrible dread would creep over her again; that the ghastly Presence would make itself felt behind her, so that she did not dare look round; that she would be conscious of something that was peering at her over her shoulder, and lurking among the very curtains of her bed. For a long time she put the whole thing down to the partial collapse of her normal health, and dipped into her favorite scientific books with a sense of comfort and support. Latterly, however—ever since her fainting fit, indeed—her convictions had undergone an extremely disagreeable shock. The logic of facts was now gradually proving too strong for her, and she had weak moments when the phenomena were intensely real—when she could scarcely any longer doubt that they were no subjective hallucinations, but saw them as the veritable results of certain hidden agencies, brought to bear upon her by an intelligent personalty whom she was constrained to identify with her murdered husband. The apparition of Gaston Mirabel forced itself upon her mind as the final proof of this; and—*if* her thought were true—it would follow that there was some truth in the Theory that he had so fondly held, and that she had so derided. She *felt* that she had seen Mirabel. The bodily frame of him, indeed, was fast dissolving into dust; but how if there was another body exactly like it, only finer, subtler, intangible indeed yet indestruc-

tible, which had been separated from the grosser framework when he died, and was now perpetually about her? It might be so—there was, after all, no absolute impossibility of it; and the thought occurred to her that perhaps we knew too little of the properties of space and matter to reject the theory that there might really be a higher sphere of being than that which we inhabit—a sphere of which our own senses are inadequate to take cognizance.

Then she had not got rid of Mirabel, after all. Her crimes had, so far, been fruitless. The man was still alive! She felt his influence every day and every night; the air was full of him; she could almost hear the passing of his ghostly form; she had once, even, gazed upon his face. Was she to be his slave forever? Was she never to be free from him, never to forget him, never to be delivered from his haunting? Was he not dead and buried—and if death could not rescue her from his unloved companionship, what in the wide world could?

There was but one reply—her marriage. Yes; with Lancaster as her husband she would be saved. His love would prove her truest shelter from the vengeance of the dead man. And perhaps a change of air and scene, combined with the happiness of his protection, and her consequent deliverance from persecution, would effect such an improvement in her physical and mental health as might enable her to regain her old, sound, scientific faith, and to look back upon her present experiences as the morbid fancies of a disorganized nervous system. Oh, for a renewed enjoyment of the peace that had once been hers—that peace which passeth understanding, which comes from a settled, rooted, steadfast Unbelief! There was a time when doubts had been unknown to her, and great had been her calm; but now, alas! she was gradually losing her faith, her cherished creed had been undermined, the most disturbing possibilities presented themselves to her, and she was in the gravest jeopardy of intellectual and religious shipwreck. A trembling Christian, tormented for the first time by misgivings as to the truth of revelation, could scarcely have suffered severer pangs than did Madame Mirabel when once she realized that materialistic atheism might possibly prove untrue.

She had even begun to get a little anxious about Lancaster's continued non-appearance, and once or twice the disturbing thought occurred to her that he might have gone further than he intended on the occasion of their last interview, and was now drawing back. She grew restless and uneasy. Mrs. Jickling was scarcely well

enough to be moved immediately, and yet there was no occasion to send specially for the doctor; no, there was nothing for it but to wait. At last the suspense grew almost unendurable. She was on the point of inventing a pretext to write to him herself, when a note from him was put into her hand.

Her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened as she tore it open. "Shall you be in to-morrow at five?" she read, as her heart beat fast. "I am very anxious to see you.—E. L." That was all; and she told herself that it was enough. The informality of the signature, the absence of any initial address, spoke volumes. Yes, she would be in. It was the very crown and crisis of her life.

She put on her widow's cap next morning for the last time—so she told herself, laughing happily. Early in the afternoon she went up-stairs and threw it off again, with a triumphant gesture, and left her delicately shaped head exposed to view with all its wealth of rich, clustering hair. Then, with a few skilful touches, she effected a transformation in her dress. She put a high, full ruff of some snow-white, gauzy material round her throat, and fastened a bunch of white and purple violets upon her shoulder; and then she surveyed herself in the glass, and saw that she looked quite young, and very, very beautiful. Her blue eyes sparkled, and her lips wreathed themselves into the happiest and sweetest smiles.

It was a century till five o'clock; but at last it came, and with it Lancaster. Her heart bounded as she heard his carriage-wheels, and she turned pale with agitation; then the front door opened and shut, and she went down-stairs to meet him.

He had never seen her look more radiantly fair. As she stood for one brief instant in the doorway she appeared to him like some bright vision from the world she did not believe in. With a simultaneous impulse they stepped forward and clasped each other's hands. The magnetic attraction of her was well-nigh too much for Lancaster; it required an almost superhuman effort not to draw her to him and press her madly to his breast. But he made the effort, and successfully. Then he placed her in a seat, and took up his stand in front of her.

"I wonder whether you guess what it is I want to say to you?" he said, looking down into her eyes.

"I think I can," she whispered.

Lancaster paused. "Ah!" he said. "To want is one thing; to be able, quite another. I think you know I love you?"

"I have hoped so," she murmured, wonderingly.

"It is at this moment my dearest wish to marry you," continued Lancaster, beginning to regain his head. "But I have been in deep trouble lately, and until that trouble is dispelled it will be impossible for me to think, even, of any happiness. I have thought much and earnestly about the matter, and have now come to the conclusion that if I am to be helped at all it is you and you alone who can do so."

"Of course I'll help you!" cried Madame Mirabel, rising. "Who has a better right or a better will? Tell me what your trouble is. I grieve that I never knew of it before."

"Why," said Lancaster, with a very tender smile, "it should be my part to keep all trouble *from* you; surely it is a cruel fate that forces me to bring it to your doors."

"Nay, not so!" she exclaimed. "Can any woman have a dearer privilege than to share all burdens with the man she loves?"

Then he thought he must have been mistaken. A warm rush of revived confidence welled up, for a moment, in his heart; he looked hopefully into her clear blue eyes, and smiled in answer.

"Come, tell me all about it," she resumed. "We are neither of us very stupid people, I imagine, and we ought to see a way through the difficulty somehow."

Yes, he would have to tell her. Indeed, what else had he come to see her for? The brief, mad, sudden betrayal of his love had not formed any part of his original plan; the storm of passion had come upon him unexpectedly, and had, in fact, increased the difficulty of his task to a somewhat embarrassing extent. It was hard for him, no doubt; but how much harder would it be for her?

"Listen, then," he said, collecting all his energies by a great act of self-command. "I have made a serious discovery. I have found out something about the person who sent me the false telegram from Lucerne."

Every vestige of color fled from her face. She sank back in her chair, unable to speak or breathe. Lancaster looked at her with a searching gaze, unwilling to condemn her till she had heard all.

"The telegram was given in by a tall, elderly woman with gray hair, who was unacquainted with any language but English," pursued Lancaster. "A woman who was certainly not acting in any way on behalf of Dr. Bretschneider—a woman who had never even heard of *me*. Do you know of any person answering to that description who was in Lucerne when the telegram was sent?"

It flashed across her mind that he must have received these particulars by some means or other through the Swiss police. The fact of course was that he had purposely adopted this mode of expression, in order, if possible, to shield the old woman from her daughter's wrath.

"The description is somewhat vague," said Madame Mirabel, with dry lips. "Couldn't the detectives give you anything nearer than that?"

"It is something to have learned even so much," replied Lancaster, cautiously. "As far as I am aware, the detectives have no notion whatever as to the identity of the person referred to. That must be sought in other directions altogether. When that is discovered we shall get some clew to the kernel of the whole mystery—the question of *motive*."

"A rather hopeless quest, it seems to me," she answered carelessly, though her face was white.

He only raised his eyebrows.

"We will leave that point for the present," he continued, leaning his elbow on the mantel-piece and supporting his forehead with his hand. "I have made one other discovery, I fear—and a very dreadful one it is. I have found out the true cause of Gaston Mirabel's death."

A hollow cry escaped her; but she uttered not a word.

"You know," he resumed, "that the whole affair was a complete mystery to me. I went over Charlton's notes again and again, but was entirely unable to account for the extraordinary symptoms he described, though he himself appeared more easily satisfied. The first suggestion I received came from the book I borrowed from your own library, a comparatively short time ago. Furnished with a new and terrible hypothesis, I went once more to Charlton, and subjected him to a pretty rigorous catechism, based upon what I had been reading. Everything seemed to point to one conclusion; still I felt scarcely competent to decide myself in a case requiring so much more special knowledge than I possessed, and at once recognized the necessity for the opinion of an expert. Yesterday I went up to town, and laid the entire matter before Dr. Warden Smith, the greatest English authority on hypnotism. Shall I tell you what he said?"

She tried to speak, but could not.

"He said it afforded grounds for the gravest possible suspicions—suspicions that the patient had not died a perfectly natural death."

"Folly!" she burst out, impetuously. "Gaston murdered—for that is what it comes to—who would murder him? Who had anything to do with him, except the man you left in charge yourself? Does your greatest English authority accuse any one in particular, or is the whole household to lie under suspicion? Surely, Dr. Lancaster, you cannot have shown your usual perspicacity in confiding in a man like that. Supposing he had gone so far as to accuse *me* of murdering my husband, surely, considering the relations in which we stand to one another, you would have found yourself in a very false position. Is there no other evidence?"

She had recovered from the panic that had seized her at first, and now, having broken the spell, was prepared to fight her battle. Lancaster looked wistfully at her, as though longing for her to confute him. But he required a stronger defence than this.

"Other evidence?" he repeated, very gravely. "No, there is no other evidence. It is believed on the highest expert authority that Gaston Mirabel was done to death by the intentional misapplication of the hypnotic power. How many persons had access to him during the last few weeks of his life? They can be reckoned on the fingers of one hand. And how many of those"—his voice trembled and deepened as he went on—"had any knowledge of hypnotic science, or had made the slightest study of it? I am told that at the last you admitted no one into the sick-room under any pretext; that you, and you alone, attended him. The conclusion suggested by these facts must be as patent to you as to myself; and it is so horrible that I implore you to dispel my doubts at once."

"You astonish me beyond measure," exclaimed Madame Mirabel. "It comes to this—that, on the unsupported opinion of a man I never heard of, and who knows nothing whatever of the case but what you have told him, I am practically accused of murder. The doctor whom you left in charge of my late husband was too stupid to understand the symptoms, and let his patient die; and now you take his memoranda, compare them with certain imaginative theories in a book you borrowed from my own book-shelf, and forthwith jump to the conclusion that Gaston was killed by me! The whole thing is so outrageous that I am at a loss what to say to you. I scarcely know which to resent the more—your evident belief that I murdered Gaston, or your implied belief that I have faith in the contemptible quackery by which you suspect me of having done it."

"You put words into my mouth that I, at least, shrank from using," replied Lancaster, striving to be calm. "I never accused you of murder. I have simply placed before you certain facts, which you and you alone can explain."

It was marvellous, even to Madame Mirabel herself, that, having now regained her equanimity, she should feel so perfectly cool and collected. But the mere fact that the contest she had so long dreaded had at last arrived, and that all her powers of resource were now being called into action, gave her wonderful nerve. She saw the weak points in her adversary's armor, and stood well upon her guard.

"My dear friend," she said, standing with clasped hands in front of him, "the truth is that neither you nor I are able to help each other in the least. The only way in which the actual facts could be elicited would be by a regular legal investigation—a trial, if you will—before a jury of doctors. Of course there is no such provision that I ever heard of, and I think that in cases like the present it would be well if there were. But we must accept things as they exist, and in view of the terrible suspicion that you have permitted yourself to harbor against me, I think that the fullest possible investigation should be made. Yes, Dr. Lancaster," she exclaimed, drawing herself up, "I am ready—nay, anxious—to be put upon my trial. More—after what you have said to me, I insist upon it. Give me at least an opportunity to clear my name before a judge in open court! And, till my innocence is proved, let us forget the words you said to me when I came into the room just now."

Lancaster, for a moment, was staggered; which she saw, and lost no time in following up her advantage.

"I think," she said, with a hurt, proud look, "that we had better postpone all further consideration of this matter until it is made public. I demand a trial; and I expect you, Dr. Lancaster, as my accuser, to take the preliminary steps. You cannot refuse. To do so would be to condone what you believe to have been a dreadful crime, and to put an eternal bar between yourself and the woman you profess to love. I will not do you the injustice of supposing that you became the subject of these suspicions with a light heart. I am willing to believe that the circumstantial evidence appeared to you so strong as to pervert your better judgment. Be it so. But I am determined that you shall do me justice as well as I you. I will not rest content with less than I have demanded; and if,

when my innocence is proved, you shrink from accepting as your wife a woman who has undergone the ignominy of a public trial, the humiliation I shall have suffered will not all rest on me."

She bowed her head slightly with a contemptuous gesture, and turned away. Truly, she told herself, she was playing her game well, for Lancaster looked the very picture of confusion and distress. Gradually but surely she was turning the tables upon him; a little more, and the victory would be gained.

"Do you mean that you actually wish me to swear a criminal information against you?" he exclaimed. "It is impossible."

"Is it?" she answered, scornfully.

"The project is a mad one," he averred with emphasis. "Julia"—and her heart thrilled as she heard him call her so—"do not, I implore you, mistake me in this matter. My love is entirely yours; it is only my head that is confused by the dreadful seemings of this case. For God's sake, answer me in all solemnity and truth. Are you responsible for this man having died?"

"Responsible!" she echoed. "I call yourself as a witness. As a nurse, could any one have been more indefatigable than I? As a wife, was I not tender, loving, devoted? Was it not I who brought you to his bedside when you first came to this place? Did not I rejoice at his wonderful recovery while in your hands? Did not I take my friends here into counsel when, in your absence, he grew worse, and telegraph for you when they advised me to? Give me *your* interpretation of all this, and let us see how it coincides with your cruel charge!"

"I am but too willing, too anxious, to accept your own," said Lancaster, fervently. "But there is one terrible, insuperable obstacle in the way. It was your mother who sent me the forged telegram from Lucerne. Who made her do it? Who knew anything of me and my affairs? And what object could there have been, if not to separate me from your husband?"

Then she knew that her fate was sealed. "Your proofs?" she uttered, turning a ghastly color.

"You were the only person in the world to whom I had breathed a syllable of the affair at all," he answered, hoarsely; "for the rest I am willing to put the question point-blank to Mrs. Jickling, and abide by what she says. Can you defend yourself against this charge also? Shall we ask her to join our conference?"

A glaze came over her eyes, and her face stiffened awfully; she struggled for breath, and clutched the window-curtain, tottering

backward against the wall to prevent herself from falling. The whole universe seemed to be crashing about her ears in that one deadly moment.

"Enough!" she gasped. "I did it. I killed him. Because I loved *you*, and he stood between us. You had better send for the police at once."

She looked at him for one second—a look in which defiance, despair, and unutterable love appeared to strive for the mastery; then passed out of the room, leaving him rooted to the spot.

Because she loved *him*! In all his wonderings and speculations Lancaster had never dreamed of this. The shock of it overwhelmed him—deprived him, for the moment, of all power of speech and motion. What! for the sake of his love that poor Mirabel had been done to death—that the whole horrible and fiendish plot had been deliberately conceived, thought out, and executed! The love he had felt for her was changed, as if by magic, into loathing. He caught up his hat, and fled in horror from the accursed house.


It was all very quiet, very still, during the next two hours. The house-maid carried lights into the dining-room, and began to lay the cloth, humming softly to herself. A little bird perched upon the window-sill, twittering; and a group of country girls passed by, chattering and laughing as they trudged merrily across the moor. Down-stairs, the stolid cook busied herself with her accustomed preparations; up-stairs, Mrs. Jickling, having finished her invalid's meal, dozed uneasily by the fire. There was a gorgeous sunset that evening—a splendor of liquid gold, clear as crystal, melting gradually away and losing itself in an expanse of infinitely pale green, pure and tender and pellucid. Only one person in Gorse Cottage saw that sunset; the others were too busy, or too sleepy, or too indifferent. But out-of-doors, as well as indoors, everything was very calm.

The little clock upon the mantel-piece chimed seven, and the cook, with commendable punctuality, announced the completion of her task. How pretty the dinner-table looked, with its fresh white napery, and the large bowl of delicious porcelain full of newly-gathered flowers! Yes, everything was in readiness, and only waiting for the mistress of it to appear. It was never necessary to call her, for she was exactitude itself, and the servants knew it. But to-day she lingered. There was no sound overhead, no foot-

step, no noise of an opening door. A quarter-past seven, and yet no sign of her. Then the house-maid plucked up her courage, and went up-stairs, and tapped. She might as well have tapped upon a tombstone. Surely her mistress must have gone out, locking the door behind her! It was very strange; she had never done so before. So the house-maid, baffled and perplexed, descended again into the nether regions and opened her heart to the cook, who suggested that madame had fallen unexpectedly asleep. Whereupon, in deference to the urgent entreaties of the house-maid, she consented to accompany the now frightened creature to the upper story, and aid her in the siege. A gentle knock was given; then a louder one; then a fanfaronade of knocks, accompanied by calls for a parley. But the tenant of the chamber—if indeed it had a tenant—remained dumb, and the servants stood whispering fearfully to themselves outside.

Mrs. Jickling, slumbering fitfully in the spare room, knew nothing of all this. It never occurred to either of them to take her into counsel, or ask her what they had better do. She had never been of much account to any one in that house, and so she was left in peace. The cook and the house-maid peeped into her room just to make sure their mistress was not there, and then went gingerly down-stairs again, partly on tiptoe, as though there were somebody dead.

They could not guess, and no one ever knew, all that had happened to the woman of whom they were in search. Her experiences, in truth, were such as she could never tell. When the black, impenetrable cloud, the deep, dense veil of darkest nothingness which had enveloped her—it might have been for the briefest second, or for a million million years—began to roll away, she looked down, and saw herself lying prostrate on the floor. At a little distance was a tiny vial, with a drop of some dark fluid still remaining in it, though the cork was nowhere to be seen; she noticed, too, a small brown stain upon the white ruff about her throat, and the little bunch of fragrant violets she had fastened on her shoulder-knot that very afternoon—or was it years ago?—still in its proper place. She looked round, and recognized the room; the bed, the dressing-table, and the chairs; and yet there was something strange in their appearance—what could it be? The outlines were distinct enough, but their bulk seemed shadowy, transparent, as it were; everything looked pervious, as though the solidity she had been accustomed to associate with material objects



was, after all, stereoscopic merely—nothing but an illusion of the senses. The whole room, too, seemed out of perspective, like a Chinese or a mediæval picture; there was something distorted about it, as though she were gazing at it from an impossible point of view. Then she knew instinctively that she had entered upon another stage of being altogether, a sphere outside that of her former life, yet enveloping and including it; unseen by human eyes, but commanding a view of all things, both human and transcendental. She knew that she was *alive*—that she had survived what would be called her death. She knew there was another world, for she was now in it. She knew that she had passed into the region of the Real, and that what she had just left was the region of the Phenomenal merely.

And now, for the first time seeing things as they were, she saw and recognized her real Self. The cognition and the contemplation of it were very fearful. It was a monstrous and a terrible Thing that rose revealed before her, now that her inner sight was opened. The whole of her past life became present—not as an act of memory, but as an inalienable part of her very self, from which she could never escape. And with it came remorse, and terror, and self-loathing, and despair; a wild, hopeless, passionate longing, too, for Lancaster—a longing compared with which the longing of her earth-life had been the idlest fancy. What would she not now have given to find herself once more in the old, familiar sphere? From her new stand-point she could still see it, as clearly as before; nay, more so, for her vision was no longer limited by walls or her liberty by bars, and from where she was she saw her mother dozing by the fire in the spare room, and the white-draped dinner-table down-stairs waiting silently for the guest who would never arrive. But near as it all was to her, she was separated from it by an impalpable, yet impenetrable, obstacle. There was no longer anything in common between her and it. The atmosphere of that lower plane afforded no vehicle for the sounds or utterances of the higher. There was no substance in it upon which the tenuous and subtle essence which constituted her present form could produce the faintest impression. She had no weight, no voice, no touch. She might as well have tried to cut water into shapes, or express emotion in the terms of algebra, as to communicate with her old sphere of being.

Once more she looked around, and saw the illimitable space that she now occupied. The house that had once been hers bore

the same relation to her present surroundings that a few scratches on a slate bear to the streets and the gardens, the mansions and the temples, of a great city. There was no up, no down, no far, no near. The conditions of existence were not such as could be expressed in the language of the lower world. And there were millions upon millions of living, sentient beings, who, to the unaccustomed eyes of the new-comer, seemed as if they were constantly appearing and disappearing, like bubbles on a stream. She could detect no motion, as we understand the word. They were and they were not, according, apparently, as they wished to be here or there. And yet there was no here and there, in the contracted earthly sense. It was all so different, so strange!

Then the picture-bedroom that she had once inhabited began to fade like a dissolving view. The outlines of everything grew faint; the whole house seemed to be toppling over, like a house of cards. With a pang of despairing agony the doomed soul witnessed the disappearance of everything it had ever believed in, and clung to, and loved. It found itself alone in the strange, new, dreadful world; alone, with its remorse, and self-loathing, and the craving that would never be appeased; alone, affrighted, and desolate, among millions of unfriendly forms.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PALLISERS SACRIFICE THEIR FEELINGS

It is a relief to find ourselves once more, if for the last time, in the pretty drawing-room of Mr. and Mrs. Palliser. Our worthy friends, after having undergone so much anxiety and distress, were now beginning to regain their equanimity. At length they knew the worst, and, having sufficiently bemoaned their fate, were conscious of a certain excitement, not wholly unpleasurable, in making plans for the future. The recovery of their wonted spirits had been aided, to a considerable extent, by finding that it would be unnecessary, after all, to sacrifice their furniture; an agreeable surprise to everybody concerned, for which thanks were due to the skilful management of Lawyer Harwood. Mr. Palliser, of course, was full of schemes. During the last few days he had received several kindly-worded letters from old acquaintances in the City, each of whom promised to "look out" for him, and to let him know as soon as ever a chance occurred; and meanwhile he was in active correspondence with the promoters of a modest enterprise for manuring the Desert of Sahara, a process which, if successful, would bring about an entire reconstruction of the map of Europe, redress the balance of power, and make the whole world's fortune.

The tragedy of Gorse Cottage came upon them, and indeed upon the entire neighborhood, like a thunder-clap. Owing to the circumstances of Madame Mirabel's death, an inquest was of course inevitable; and Dr. Lancaster, having been the last person to see the deceased alive, was compelled to give some account of that most dreadful interview. It was, indeed, only in deference to the great and universal respect in which Lancaster was held that the coroner abstained from putting such questions to him as would have necessitated the entire revelation of everything connected with the death of Dr. Mirabel, including the motive confessed to by the murderess; as it was, enough was elicited to establish the fact that there had been a dark, bad secret in the dead woman's life—a secret the detection of which had been the main cause of

her suicide. The inquiry, again, was held at Petersfield, and the distance prevented many persons from attending who would otherwise no doubt have done so; the upshot being that much unnecessary scandal was averted, the usual verdict of Temporary Insanity being delivered in due course. All this having been gone through, preparations for the funeral were set on foot. It was generally understood that a large attendance was not desirable in view of the painful nature of the circumstances, and several persons denied themselves in consequence the satisfaction they would otherwise have found in being present. A clergyman, however, could scarcely be dispensed with, and application was naturally made to the rector. But here a difficulty arose. To the surprise of every one who knew him, Mr. Grant replied that, being a serious man, he really could not take part in such a farce, and for a day or two there was some trouble in finding a suitable comedian. At length, by great good-luck, a very charitable person was discovered, who never judged anybody lest he should be judged himself. This gentleman undertook to commit, and, in the presence of Gerard, Lancaster, and Mrs. Jickling, actually did commit, the vampire's body to the grave, in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life; adding an expression of his hearty thanks to Almighty God for His goodness in having delivered her from the miseries of this most sinful world.

"Funerals always do try me dreadfully, you know," sighed Mrs. Palliser to her husband, as they sat alone together on the afternoon of this edifying ceremony. "I never could have gone to this one, and it's just as well that you didn't go either. Let us hope now that we shall be permitted to forget her as soon as possible. I wonder whether it *is* true that there was anything between her and Dr. Lancaster?"

"Shouldn't wonder a bit," replied Mr. Palliser, without raising his eyes from the pile of letters and prospectuses that he was sorting. "She was a remarkably clever woman as well as a very handsome one, and there's nothing more likely than that Lancaster was a bit taken with her."

"Ah, men are such fools," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "I do think that Dr. Lancaster ought to have known better—a man of his age. How thankful we ought to be that dear Gerard was never bewitched by her! I had my fears at one time; I don't mind confessing it now that there's no more danger. That *would* have been a calamity, indeed."

"H'm—yes," murmured the good gentleman, absently, as he scanned his papers. "Upon my word, there ought to be money in some o' these things. The trouble seems to be that one can't get a secretaryship or an agency without taking an interest in the concern one's self, and that means stumping up five hundred or a thousand pounds, which we unfortunately haven't got. Now here's a concern that ought to do well, you know—The Twins and Triplets Birth Insurance Co., established for the special benefit of the laboring classes and the poorer clergy. They're always having twins, you know, and it's only right they should be enabled to make some provision against it. Serious thing to some people, this occasional exuberance of nature."

"That sounds to me a little impious," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "If it pleases Providence—"

"Why is it more impious to insure against superfluous births than against premature deaths?" retorted her husband. "However," he said, pushing away his desk, "I don't think there's anything here that'll suit me just at present. We must wait, I suppose, and meantime I fancy the sooner we move up to London the better. It's always well to be on the spot, you know, in case of contingencies, and we shall be able to find some cheap lodgings to stay in while we're looking about us."

The idea of cheap London lodgings was very distressing to poor Mrs. Palliser, whose taste lay more in the direction of buttercups and country air. She sighed rather despondently at the prospect, and asked her husband what neighborhood he was thinking of.

"Oh, I don't know," he replied; "there are lots of neighborhoods to choose from. There's Earl's Court, for instance, only a few minutes from Kensington Gardens, and a little farther from the City, where there are any amount of lodgings at rents that are perfectly ridiculous. Chelsea, again; only of course that's rather more out of the way. Pimlico might suit—it's conveniently situated for some things. Bloomsbury is expensive and philistine; I don't think I'd go to Bloomsbury. But we needn't trouble our heads about a neighborhood. There won't be any difficulty there."

"And the furniture, Marmaduke? Oh, what a blessing it is we haven't had to sacrifice the furniture! What shall we do with that in the meantime?"

"Why, we shall have to sell it, I suppose," responded Mr. Pal-

liser. "It won't be much use to us without a house to put it in, and we can't count upon that just now, you know, of course."

"Sell it!" cried Mrs. Palliser, in consternation. "My dear Marmaduke, what for? I thought you told me that Harwood had said the furniture need *not* be sold?"

"Now just see what sort of a head you have for business," retorted her husband, witheringly. "What Harwood said was that the furniture need not be sold for the benefit of the creditors; that there was no necessity for throwing it into the common melting-pot. Whether we sell it or keep it is nothing to anybody but ourselves; only if we don't sell it, how are we going to support ourselves for the next few months, I should be glad to know?"

"Dear me, I never thought of that," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, looking the picture of despair. "Oh, my poor china! And all those dear little silver ostriches, you know, to hold salt and pepper, and the new curtains in your poor mother's bedroom, that she chose herself! Well, well; I can only hope it'll be a reminder to us that here we have no continuing city," added the poor lady, wiping her eyes. "No doubt all these dispensations, so mysterious and so—so very unpleasant, are sent to us for some wise and good purpose, and I dare say we deserve them all. Oh yes, there's not a question about it, and I sometimes quite shudder when I think what *might* happen to us if we got our deserts and nothing more; ah me! Still, it *is* a pity about those little cruets, you know, and all those beautiful new table-napkins, just marked—only just marked, Marmaduke," she concluded, shaking her head plaintively; "and there's nothing for it but resignation, after all."

"No, I suppose not," assented Mr. Palliser, who was not very much of a theologian himself. "At any rate, until something definite turns up. Gerard's off our hands, that's one comfort. I wonder what *he'll* do with himself, now that he's got the chance?"

Any reply on the part of Mrs. Palliser was interrupted by the sound of footsteps in the hall. "There he is!" she exclaimed. "How quickly he has got back, to be sure. My dear, just touch the bell, will you? We may as well have some tea."

The door opened, and Gerard entered, but not alone; he was accompanied by Dr. Lancaster. Both were of course in mourning, and both looked pale and worn; Gerard's face, however, seemed to have undergone a certain change, which could scarcely have escaped the most ordinary observer. The dreamy, half-indifferent expression had to a great extent disappeared, and in its place there

was a firmer and altogether more decided look—a look which suggested a capacity for action rather than his constitutional tendency to contemplation, and imparted a character to his whole appearance that had certainly been lacking previously. The lad looked manlier, somehow—less dreamy, and more self-reliant than his wont.

“Well, Gerard dear, so you’re back. Ah, Dr. Lancaster, this is most kind of you,” said Mrs. Palliser, in a tone of cordial welcome. “You’ll be glad of some tea, no doubt. I hope you haven’t caught cold, either of you, standing about on the damp ground.”

This was the only reference that any of them made to what had been taking place during the afternoon.

“We’re just winding up our affairs,” remarked Mr. Palliser, a few minutes afterwards, when they were drinking tea. “I suppose we shall be flitting in a week or two now—seeking fresh woods and pastures new. It’ll be a wrench, of course, but where’s the use of crying over spilt milk? One must buy one’s experience, and sometimes it costs one uncommon dear.”

“Might I ask whether you have any definite plans?” inquired Dr. Lancaster, as he put down his cup.

“We think of settling in London to begin with,” replied Mr. Palliser, who never made any secret of his affairs. “The furniture ought to bring us in a tolerably comfortable sum, and that no doubt will tide us over the next few months. Long before then I expect I shall have succeeded in making—er—permanent arrangements. At present,” continued the worthy gentleman, “it’s rather an *embarras de richesses*. There are schemes offering in all directions—any amount of ’em. My old friends in the City are rallying round me, just as I said they would. They all promise me the very first chance that offers. And in the meantime—well! I should just like you to run your eyes over some of those prospectuses,” with a wave of his plump white hand towards the pile of papers on his desk. “This smash-up in the City is clearing the air wonderfully, and the number of new enterprises being started shows how much healthier a state of things is coming on. I shouldn’t wonder, after all, if it turns out to have been just the very thing we wanted.”

Gerard and Lancaster exchanged glances.

“God grant it!” said poor Mrs. Palliser, thinking of her new table-napkins and pretty teacups. “I confess I am dreadfully disappointed that all this will have to go”—casting her eyes fondly round the room. “I know it’s very wicked to repine, but it’s

difficult to help it, somehow; and when I think of lodgings in Pimlico or some such place, after my dear lawns and flowers, I really don't know how I shall live through it."

"Nothing like making up one's mind to the inevitable," said her husband, with the air of a man who knew all about it by experience.

"But is it inevitable?" asked Lancaster. "Why, for instance, should you go into lodgings in Pimlico?"

"In order to be on the spot," said Mr. Palliser, promptly. "Nothing like being in the swim of things, you know. And at present, at any rate, we can't afford to take a house of our own."

"I think I can suggest a better plan than that," said Gerard, speaking for the first time.

Both his parents looked at him inquiringly. "Why—what do you propose, my dear?" asked his mother with some interest.

"Well," he replied slowly, "in the first place I don't think it at all necessary for you to live so near the City. In fact, I think that—that—the farther you're away from the City the better. Now while I was in the Quantocks I happened to see a house about a mile out of Williton that rather struck my fancy. It was built in a sort of cottage style, with a good large garden round it—rather a wilderness, it's true, but that could soon be put to rights. The rooms are a fair size, though they wouldn't hold *all* this furniture, of course—it would suit you to sell some of it—and as the place has been on the landlord's hands some time he'd be ready to do it up and make it habitable if taken for a term of years. The rent's cheap enough—£30—and I've got the refusal of it. You'd much better go and live there. It'll suit you much better than Pimlico."

A very expressive pause followed. "Oh, my *dear* Gerard!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser at last.

"The country's wonderfully pretty," he continued, "and living's cheap. It's healthy, too, and you'd be able to raise any amount of flowers, you know, and make friends among the neighbors, and all that. In fact, you mustn't think of going into London lodgings," he added, in a tone of authority. "It would never do. Lancaster will agree with me there, I know."

"But what are you going to do yourself, my boy?" asked his father.

"I? Oh, I'm going to travel," said Gerard, in an off-hand way. "I can tell you about all that later. Just now I want to settle

about this house at Williton, so that I can write and come to terms with the agent at once. I suppose you've no real objection, have you?"

"But it's all so sudden, my dear," ejaculated Mrs. Palliser. "I don't know what to say about it, I'm sure. Do you think we could live as cheaply in the country as we could—"

"You'll certainly be able to live comfortably enough on three hundred a year," replied Gerard. "I'm already provided for; you needn't trouble your heads about me. I have a career opening for me abroad, and my proposal is that during my absence the income my grandmother left me shall be paid over to you. Lancaster has kindly promised to see to that. The whole thing is as simple as it can be. I sha'n't want the money, and you will have the use of it while I'm away—that's all."

The old people said nothing. Mrs. Palliser wiped away a silent tear or two, and her husband blew his nose loudly, with a deep frown; but it seemed a difficult thing for either of them to speak. A settled income—a sweet country home—and part, at any rate, of the pretty furniture she loved so well—yes, it was indeed a pleasant prospect; and the good lady began to think that, after all, Providence was going to relent, and temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Gerard saw that the battle was so far virtually won. The most difficult task, of course, was still before him.

"But what's this career that you say you've got?" asked Mr. Palliser at last, in a rather stifled voice.

"It's one that will give me work—the very sort of work I've always wanted," replied the lad, boldly, "and support me into the bargain. Of course," he added, rather cunningly, "as I have always my own money to fall back upon, I don't want to make a fortune. And it'll be a change, and I shall see something of other parts, and gain experience, you know. Of course you'll hear from me while I'm away."

"But what is it, and whereabouts, and how long shall you be there?" inquired his mother, anxiously.

"Well," replied Gerard, "it's a post that's connected with—er—science, to some extent, and also with education. I shall be learning and teaching at the same time. And I needn't stay a day longer than I want to. I could come back any time, in fact. Supposing, for instance, father were to succeed in getting any of those agencies or secretaryships, and you wanted to move into town, I don't think there'd be any difficulty in my returning in time to

take over the house at Williton, you know. Nothing could be more convenient in that way, I assure you."

"H'm," muttered Mr. Palliser, with a meditative air. "You certainly seem to have fallen on your feet, Gerard. And what is the post? Whereabouts?"

"It's in Saghalien," he replied briefly.

"Saghalien?" echoed his mother, looking considerably perplexed. "Now where did I hear something about Saghalien not so very long ago? I remember perfectly—no—well, somebody was telling me something about it, I'm sure, though what it was I really—"

"Saghalien?" repeated Mr. Palliser, in astonishment. "Why, it's a sort of desert, isn't it, somewhere in the Arctic Circle? My word, yes—I know all about it; a great place for salmon-fishing, to be sure. Ah, I used to be very fond of salmon-fishing, when I was a young man. Many's the big catch I've had in Norway and in Scotland—fine sport when you get enough of it, very. But you're not going there for the salmon altogether, I take it—eh? Though I tell you what, my boy—if you were to keep your weather-eye open, and just let me know what prospects there are for something like a regular business, you understand—fishing, curing, smoking, tinning, and that sort o' thing, why we might see what's to be done in the way of a limited company. I should be on the spot here, you know, and you'd be on the spot there, and between us we might work up something worth having. It's not at all a bad idea. What do you think about it, Lancaster?"

"It sounds very attractive," said the doctor, smiling gravely.

"I'll certainly bear it in mind when I arrive," said Gerard. "There may be seals in the neighborhood, too—they would prove even more profitable still."

This suggestion captivated Mr. Palliser to such an extent that for some time he really forgot that he had never inquired what Gerard's actual business was to be. His son, however, knowing that the fact would have to be disclosed sooner or later, saw the futility of availing himself of his father's preoccupation, and considered that he would probably never have a more favorable opportunity of laying his plans before them than the present.

"But you haven't told us what your occupation is to be, Gerard dear," said his mother, with some anxiety.

"I'm going to join that Secular Mission that Lancaster was telling us about some weeks ago," he replied.

"Secular Mission!" exclaimed Mr. Palliser, astonished.

"Oh, Marmaduke, he's going among the lepers!" cried the mother in a sudden burst of consternation. "I remember it all now; of course, it was Dr. Lancaster who told us of it. Why, Gerard, my own darling child, you must be mad to think of such a thing! I will never permit it—never. And we are to live upon your money all the time, while you are in that horrible place and exposed to the most awful danger from infection—and such infection! Marmaduke, tell him he mustn't dream of such a thing. Oh, Dr. Lancaster, it isn't you who have put this into his head, is it?"

"No, mother, it was not Lancaster," said Gerard, quickly.

"But what is it? what's it all about?" inquired Mr. Palliser. "This is the first I've heard of it. Lepers! What in the world does the boy want to go among a lot of lepers for, I should be glad to know?"

Gerard glanced at Lancaster, who promptly responded to the appeal. He gave Mr. Palliser a brief though comprehensive account of the Leper Settlement in Saghalien, and the various charitable undertakings that were in course of being carried out in connection with it, dwelling chiefly upon the objects of the Secular Mission, and the results which were hoped for from its work among the sufferers. He said nothing about Gerard personally, but pointed out the usefulness and value of the enterprise from the standpoint of pure philanthropy.

"Well, it all sounds very fine and very noble," observed Mr. Palliser, who, to do him justice, was a great deal more moved than he cared to show, "but what I want to know is why Gerard should insist on taking up this particular work. Surely there are lots of undertakings in England that he might go in for—quite as useful, and yet without danger to his health. There's slumming, for instance, that's not a bad sort o' thing to take up; or—or—oh, I don't know; there are any amount of things of the same sort. But going to the North Pole, or wherever it is, to work among the lepers—why, I'd almost sooner he enlisted!"

"It's too cruel," sobbed Mrs. Palliser. "We shall never see you again, Gerard; you'll catch the leprosy before you've been there a month, and—oh, to think of the sacrifice of your dear young life, my boy, my own, own boy! Oh, Dr. Lancaster, dissuade him—Marmaduke, you mustn't let him go. The very thought of it half kills me. He's the only child I have, and I cannot give him up."

"The dangers of infection are very greatly exaggerated, believe

me," interposed Dr. Lancaster. "With careful regard to diet and certain sanitary precautions, there is no ground whatever for fear that he will contract the disease. You must remember that there is an excellent medical staff consisting of scientific men who have made leprosy their special study, and now that the leper-bacillus has been discovered, we may hope that the medical authorities in Saghalien may achieve the honor of discovering an antidote, or counter-agent—resulting it may be in the cure, and even in the extinction, of the malady altogether. Every safeguard is employed in the interest of the members of the mission, and the rules are extremely stringent, I assure you. Nobody need, nobody *can*, catch the disease who doesn't 'go in' for doing so, as Damien did. The danger of infection is, in fact, reduced to a minimum, while the possibilities are, from a scientific and pathological standpoint, magnificent. Gerard would not, of course, be able to participate in the technicalities of the undertaking, as he knows nothing, I believe, of medicine; but he would co-operate, and that by giving the sufferers themselves a new interest in life—teaching them, amusing them, working with them, taking part in their physical and intellectual recreation, and so not only making the world a happier place for them than it has hitherto been, but rendering the patients more susceptible, through their improved mental condition, to the treatment of the doctors. That is the practical side of the question. I need not expatiate upon the moral value of the undertaking, subjectively considered; your own opinion, however, would, no doubt, coincide with mine."

Mrs. Palliser's sobs grew rather less spasmodic, and she wiped her eyes, making a valiant effort to be comforted; but her distress was still very great. She turned towards her husband, wondering what he would say; but Mr. Palliser's brow was dark, and he only hummed and grunted portentously to himself, as his wont was when in a quandary. At that moment, so critical a moment in the three lives concerned, there came a loud ring at the front-door bell, accompanied by a prolonged knock. A visit just then seemed to all of them most unfortunately timed; to Gerard, however, it came as a relief, and even to his parents it afforded a certain mitigation of feelings too painful to be borne much longer.

"My dear good creature," exclaimed Mrs. Fullerton, rustling into the room in her voluminous black silks, and making straight for Mrs. Palliser, "I've been wanting to come and see you for an age; I can't tell you how much we've all been thinking about you

this last week or two, and wondering what we could do to comfort you. And how do *you* do, Mr. Palliser? Ah, it's been a trying time—you needn't tell me that, *I* know all about it. And Dr. Lancaster, I declare!" added the good lady, with a touch of diffidence. "Well, well, I won't say anything—I never do, you know; but I sympathize, you must understand, sympathize very strongly, with everybody who's in trouble."

Gerard, under cover of the growing darkness, had quietly slipped out of the room.

"Ah, it's been a terrible time lately, hasn't it?" resumed Mrs. Fullerton, settling herself in a comfortable chair and accepting a cup of tea. "And we've all felt it, you know. At times like these we can't help feeling how we're all members one of another, and the whole world kin, so to speak. It's a wonderful thing, the human heart, I often think; isn't it, Mr. Palliser?"

"Most unaccountable," replied that gentleman, not having any very distinct idea as to what was meant.

Dr. Lancaster here rose, and very gravely took his leave. He had matters to attend to, he said, of some importance, and it was getting late. Mr. Palliser saw him to the front door, and he drove rapidly away.

"Well, now," exclaimed Mrs. Fullerton, as soon as the coast was clear, "I do wonder what the real truth of all that business was. I'm afraid she was a wicked woman, you know; and yet I had got positively fond of her, during the last few months. There was a way about her, somehow, that was quite fascinating, and made you take to her while it was altogether impossible to approve of her. The whole thing has made me perfectly ill. Only the other day, you know, in my drawing-room, the life and soul of the party; and now—dead by her own hand! The only consolation is that *somebody's* had an escape. How worn and ill he looks!"

"Yes, he must have suffered very much—if all reports are true," said Mrs. Palliser.

"Oh, they are true enough, I'm afraid," responded Mrs. Fullerton, nodding till the feathers in her bonnet vibrated again. "It's a bad business when a fine man like that lets himself be captivated by a designing woman—a pretty life she'd have led him if she'd had the chance. But there, I don't want to think any more about it than I can help. She's put herself beyond the scope of *our* judgment, and we can only hope she'll find more mercy where

she's gone than she deserves, poor creature. One can't have a better wish for her than that."

"I suppose you haven't heard anything about the funeral?" asked Mrs. Palliser.

"I? Oh, dear no," answered Mrs. Fullerton. "I suppose the old mother was there; they could scarcely have kept her away, I should think. I wonder what'll become of *her*, now that her daughter's dead? However, I didn't come here to talk about all this. I want to know what *you* dear people are going to do with yourselves, and whether it really is true that you're thinking of leaving Hindhead."

"Oh yes, that is true enough," said Mrs. Palliser, quietly. "We have lost all our money through these troubles in the City, and we've got to begin the world all over again."

"You don't mean that?" exclaimed Mrs. Fullerton. "That's bad news—at least, it sounds so. Let's hear more about it. What do you intend to do?"

Mrs. Palliser gave a little embarrassed cough, and hesitated. Her husband hummed once or twice, and began to clear his throat. The communicativeness of these good people certainly knew no bounds.

"The fact is," said Mr. Palliser, coming to his wife's rescue, "that the last half-hour or so has brought a rather remarkable change over—er—over our plans. We hardly know what to do. Before that, our idea was to take lodgings in London until certain—er—permanent arrangements were completed. I am not altogether without prospects, in any case; prospects in the City, you understand. Of course I'm very well known there, and with my business capacity there's every reason to believe I might get into some very lucrative undertaking. In fact," jerking his head backward in the direction of his desk, "there are fortunes to be made in half a dozen different ways. But now—"

"Well; and now?" put in Mrs. Fullerton, as he paused.

"You may as well tell Mrs. Fullerton the whole thing, my dear," said Mrs. Palliser.

Then it all came out. Bit by bit the worthy couple narrated the story of Gerard's proposal with regard to the disposition of his income, and the plans he had formed for his own future. It took some time in the telling, for they constantly interrupted each other, and interspersed little sighs and groans and exclamations—at least, Mrs. Palliser did; but at last the narrative was finished,

both text and commentary, and a rather ominous silence supervened.

"Oh!" snapped Mrs. Fullerton, at last. "And what do you propose to do?"

"We don't know *what* to do!" cried Mrs. Palliser, with a little sob. "How can we reconcile ourselves to living upon the dear boy's own money while he is an exile in that dreadful place all those thousands of miles away?"

"I feel as though I should never be able to respect myself again," said Mr. Palliser. "If it weren't for my wife's sake—"

"Oh, Marmaduke, don't say that!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "I know what a useless creature I am; but I could put up with any privations sooner than feel I was sacrificing dear Gerard's happiness. Suppose he were never to come back!"

"Now wait a minute, my dear," interposed Mrs. Fullerton. "Just answer me a question or two. You talk about sacrificing Gerard's happiness. Do you think, then, it would conduce to his happiness to enjoy his own fortune while you were starving in a London lodging-house?"

"Starving!" exclaimed Mr. Palliser, rather indignantly. "With the prospects I have in view—"

"Prospects won't keep you in beef and pudding, my good friend, and prospects won't pay your rent," said Mrs. Fullerton, rather brusquely. "Gerard's a very young man, and can afford to spend a few years in making himself useful in the world. It's only just and proper that he should come to his parents' rescue now that they're in trouble, and I don't see that you've any right whatever to prevent him."

"But it's none the less painful for us—" began Mrs. Palliser.

"Painful? Of course it's painful," retorted Mrs. Fullerton. "But think what it is for him! Come, my dear, you're a religious woman, and you oughtn't to want me to remind you that it's more blessed to give than to receive. Why should you always want to keep the better part yourself? Why should you grudge your boy the blessedness of giving to you, when you've been giving to him so generously all these years? Why should you shrink from enduring a little pain when you know that it's only the price you have to pay for the pleasure that will accrue to him? Aye, and *such* pleasure. Ah, my dear, don't grudge it him. I had a son once, my dear—well, there are some griefs that never die, I suppose. His ideas of pleasure were different from Gerard's, and the

pain they gave me had a sting in it that yours can never have. Be thankful that your boy is what he now proves himself to be, and, if he is still bent upon this work, bid him, in God's name, go forth and do it!"

Mrs. Fullerton's face had grown red in her excitement, and she nodded her head with an earnestness that was almost fierce; then, in spite of all her efforts, two great tears started to her eyes, and rolled down her large cheeks before she could get out her pocket-handkerchief. Mr. Palliser rose from his chair, and began to pace the room in a brown-study, while his wife wept silently where she sat.

"Well," he said at last, "of course that's one way of looking at it. We shall have to think the matter over. And then there's no reason why the boy should stay out there indefinitely. Long before he comes back again I shall be in a very different position, of course; and in the meantime he'll always know he's got a home in England, ready and waiting to receive him. I only wish he'd fixed upon rather a cleaner occupation in the meantime."

"Oh, my dear, if it's God's will, He will take care of him," said the mother, wiping away her tears. "How I shall pray for him—morning, noon, and night!"

"Well, now I shall say good-bye," said Mrs. Fullerton, getting up rather suddenly. "You think over what I've said, now, and come and see me as soon as ever you can. You won't be leaving for a week or two, I think you said. There'll be plenty of time. And if I can help you in any way, you know—packing up, or anything of that sort—why, you must just let me know."

"I will, indeed, dear Mrs. Fullerton, and thank you a thousand times," said Mrs. Palliser, gratefully.

"Say good-bye to Gerard for me," continued the good lady; "I suppose he isn't in. Perhaps it's just as well he isn't, for he's rather a reserved boy, I've noticed, and—and—I do think that if he were here now I should be tempted to give him a kiss. There! Don't you tell him, mind; he'd never forgive me, I'm afraid. Good-bye, once more—good-bye."

Mrs. Fullerton was soon tramping at a leisurely pace in the direction of her own house, having left the Pallisers something with which to occupy their minds in the shape of a perfectly new idea. It is rather bewildering, no doubt, when one is told for the first time that acceptance of an easy and agreeable life at the expense of another's toil may be an act of self-sacrifice even greater than

that of the giver; and to these good, easy-going, affectionate people the notion seemed a hopeless paradox. Their final decision was of course a foregone conclusion, though they scarcely recognized the fact; and they were assisted in arriving at it by Gerard's assurance that the preparations for his voyage were virtually completed, and that his own determination was irrevocable. Gradually, therefore, they got first accustomed, and then almost reconciled, to the arrangement; so that within the next few days Mrs. Palliser was cheerfully engaged in deciding whether a flower or a stripe would be more suitable for the curtains in her new drawing-room, and weighing the respective merits of kamptulicon and Chinese matting as a floor-cloth for the hall.

CHAPTER XXX

AFTERWARDS

OUR curtain rises for the last time. It is but a short while since the events recorded in the foregoing chapter, but the changes that have come about are neither few nor small. There have been changes of place and circumstance, and these are naturally the most obvious; there have also been changes of mood and mind, and these are the most important.

Now Mr. Austin Caxton, relying upon the authority of Fielding, who was "an artistical writer and knew what he was about," lays it down as the duty of an author to intrude his personality upon the reader every now and then, in the form of direct address. The reader, however, is generally (and very justly) impatient of such digressions, which he calls by the generic name of padding; and there are few authors other than Fielding and the creator of Mr. Caxton who can afford to take the liberty. The present writer cannot afford to do so, for one; and therefore—being about to do it—craves pardon in anticipation. His offence is perpetrated late in the story, and will be soon over. There is an unwritten but widely recognized canon that every novel is bound to end (what is called) "happily." This is a euphemism which means that one if not two couples from among the characters have to be married in the last chapter. Of course it would be impertinent for any one to affirm that this explanation is necessarily and palpably irrelevant. A marriage may be a happy ending, or it may not. In many cases it seems to be an unhappy beginning—judging from what one reads in the newspapers. On the other hand, even a *marriage de convenance* has been known to produce results in which the *convenances* have been conspicuously absent. But however this may be, it is surely time a protest were made against the tyrannical law in question. If a novel can, without violence to probability, be coaxed into ending happily, by all means let advantage be taken of its pliancy; but to say that the coupling together of two persons for the term of their

natural lives is the only way in which a story of human passion, and foibles, and vicissitudes can satisfactorily end, is, to say the least, a somewhat sweeping statement. Marriage is not the *summum bonum* of human felicity; it is simply a means to an end, and sometimes a very inadequate means, too. A wedding may be poetical, idyllic, and—given good dress-makers and an artistic florist—even picturesque; and chimes, at a certain distance, sound not unpleasantly in the ears of one who has not been a participator in the ceremony. But marriage is the exact reverse. It is prosaic, it is humdrum, it is very, very real. Nothing can undo it, saving crime and death. The condition is a condition of servitude; bearable, no doubt, in most cases, because so many people bear it, pleasant in the cases of a few, but servitude nevertheless. And the position too often assigned to it in fiction, as the crown and climax of a story, is surely at variance with its position in real life. There it is only a prelude to the comedy or tragedy ensuing. Without it, many of the most familiar of our *dramatis personæ* could not exist. The mother-in-law, for instance, would be no more than an abstraction, a potentiality, an unknown creature of the imagination. The decessable wife's sister would be powerless to threaten the equanimity of the wife, to disturb the peace of bishops, and generally contribute her share to the pleasure of the world she lives in. There would be no husband's bachelor friends for the wife to be jealous of or fall in love with; no step-mothers to make things pleasant for children already in existence, no hen-pecked Benedicks, no troublesome gray mares. For all these things we are indebted to marriage; they could no more exist without it than color without light, and the observer, if he be not too tender-hearted, reaps the benefit. To drop the curtain on a marriage, therefore, is an artistic blunder only less serious than the forcible dragging-in of a marriage, *vi et armis*, in deference to the supposed predilections of some unknown reader. Surely the characters in a story should be suffered to do what people do in real life—shape their destinies according to their natural dispositions as far as circumstances allow; and I submit that none of the personages whose fortunes we have followed hitherto are in a position to marry without the grossest violation of dramatic propriety, or should be permitted to do so if they wished. The few lines which still remain to be written will, it is hoped, make this sufficiently clear.

To begin with, the crisis through which he had passed resulted in the formation, by Lancaster, of two very serious resolutions. The

first was to avoid any but the most purely formal, that is to say professional, relations with women. It was enough for him that he had once known what true love really is; that experience could never, in the nature of things, be repeated; and the warning he had received to refrain from any attempt to reproduce it was terrible enough to last him all his life. The second was equally judicious. He determined to devote himself to the special and exclusive study of therapeutic hypnotism, with a view to employing it as a curative agent in cases of both physical and moral infirmity. The power of it to ease pain, alleviate morbid symptoms, and vitalize the bodily functions was now, in his eyes, incontestable; and, looking upon the phenomena called sin, vice, wickedness—in fact, all moral imperfection of whatever kind—as manifestations of *disease*, he resolved to become, as far as he was able, a true Physician of the Soul—destroying, by hypnotic suggestion, the very love of vice itself, and all desire or even tendency to indulge in it. He was now fully convinced that, by virtue of this divine faculty, the gambler, the drunkard, the sensualist, the termagant, and the thief might be cured of their tyrant vices as surely and as safely as the dyspeptic or the scrofulous, and transformed into “saved,” or healthy, souls; saved in the truest sense of the word, by being freed from sin. The one misgiving that presented itself to his mind was lest this short-cut, this royal road, to goodness might not be condemned upon the mere ground that it dispensed with that desperate moral conflict, success in which alone means achievement of the only goodness worth the name. Still, a sick man cured by external agency is surely a happier and more useful being than one left to die because he cannot cure himself; to be even a good automaton is better than to be a bad man; and if the question of moral responsibility be raised, it is clear that a very grave amount of such responsibility would rest upon the man who preferred continuance in vice or sin to liberation from it through therapeutic hypnotism—who elected, in short, to remain a victim to his own moral disorganization instead of invoking the aid of one who had it in his power to say, and to say effectively, “Go, and sin no more!” Surely, pondered Lancaster, all other inventions and discoveries sink into insignificance when compared with this wonderful and peerless gift; by the trained exercise of which moral weakness can be made strong, human beings delivered from the bondage of their most despotic vices, and sin itself “suggested” out of existence.

Mrs. Jickling, in consequence of her daughter having died intestate, inherited all her money. She found herself, in fact, in exceedingly comfortable circumstances, and forthwith gave up all thoughts of retiring to a cheap *pension* at Heidelberg. But it was not only in her circumstances that she was different from what she had previously been. The sordid tragedy in which she had borne a part had in truth exercised a powerful influence upon her, and from that time forward she was a changed woman. Before, she had certainly been a sinner, and it is not, perhaps, too much to say that she was one still; but now she became uneasily conscious of the fact, and began to turn her thoughts towards religion. It would be scarcely true to affirm that she became less mean, less narrow, less selfish, than in former days; her idiosyncrasies were too deeply-rooted to undergo any marked or conspicuous improvement, even under the influence of her new faith. But somehow they assumed a different shape, and were manifested in different modes. Not far from the respectable and eminently genteel house she took in the neighborhood of Homerton, there was a certain low-browed, plain brick building, standing near the entrance of a mews, and frequented, as she did not fail to notice, by a number of rather oddly-dressed, not to say shabby, persons every Sunday morning. In answer to her inquiries she was informed that the building was a "room"; and, somewhat mystified by the expression, she determined to venture into it next time the doors were open. She found herself in a plain, square, whitewashed apartment, furnished with hard deal benches. At one end there was a table, covered with a coarse white cloth, on which stood a plate containing an ordinary cottage loaf, a glass jug half-full of wine, and two thick-tumblers. The congregation, which numbered some fifty or sixty persons, assembled slowly and silently; and then a tall, gaunt, ascetic-looking man, who sat near the table, rose and offered prayer. Mrs. Jickling, not a little wondering, and somewhat awe-struck, now became very attentive. The strange informality of the proceedings, the solemn silences between the hymns and the readings and the prayers, the unexpected rising of a man here and a man there to give out a chapter or to pray, the tacit assumption on the part of the worshippers that "the Lord" was peculiarly and exclusively *their* Lord—theirs and nobody else's—had a very powerful effect upon her. These, then, were "the elect" of whom she had heard in years gone by—these oddly-dressed, solemn people; while she, sitting at the back, and carefully passed over when the loaf and the

wine went round, she was an outcast, a worldling, a religious pariah. The whole thing took a strong hold on her imagination. She went again, and yet again; was noticed, and spoken to, by two or three of the leaders; and, within three months, was formally received into the community, which proved to be a branch of the Darbyite sub-section of the Plymouth Brethren. Under the influences now brought to bear upon her she learned to regard the little brotherhood in the light of "a garden walled around, chosen and made peculiar ground;" the members thereof as, not so much the special, as the only, people of God; and all other religious denominations, together with missionary societies, and philanthropic organizations for the social, moral, and spiritual improvement of "the world" generally, as—at their best—churches of Laodicea, and—at their worst—synagogues of Satan. In short, she made a very good "Brethren" indeed; there is no doubt that she was considerably happier than she had been before, and I do not think that she was any worse.

About a mile from the little town of Williton, perched on rich, grassy slopes commanding a view of the Bristol Channel, and surrounded by yellow cornfields, stood Mousetoës Manor, the Pallisers' new home. How it ever came by such a name, nobody seemed to know; Mrs. Palliser declared at once that she could not and would not put up with it. In the first place, it was not a manor in any sense of the word. It was just an unpretending, irregular, comfortable sort of house, built of thick rough cobble that had been washed a mellow cream-color, with diamond-paned windows and a roof of dark red pantiles—for the "slated hideousness" which deforms the face of nature in most parts of England is but seldom seen in Quantockian Somersetshire—containing some half-dozen tolerably spacious rooms, low-pitched, perhaps, and just a trifle sombre, but adorned with not a little finely-carved dark oak. It had been well furnished, too, for Mrs. Palliser had put as much of her Hindhead treasures into it as it would hold—and that was not much more than a third of them, so there was money in hand from the auction-sale of the rest; and around it on all sides lay a large but neglected garden, with any amount of thick soft turf, and rich brownish-crimson soil; and a belt of spreading trees. A sunny place it was, too, its position giving one that delightful sense of altitude and exhilaration so conducive to habitual cheerfulness; while its warmth and harmony of coloring threw over it a certain suggestion of the picturesque, which many far more pre-

tentious edifices so often lack. Mrs. Palliser fell speedily in love with it, the more so, she averred, as it belonged to her dear boy Gerard. But "Mousetoes" it should not be. The day before he left, Gerard, who happened to have been reading *Lycidas*, suggested "High Lawns" as at once appropriate and classical. His mother caught at the idea, and with tears in her eyes vowed that any name consecrated by her son's approval needed no other recommendation. As High Lawns, therefore, the house was known thenceforth.

And Gerard himself—where was he, on that sweet summer evening, while Mr. and Mrs. Palliser, gradually recovering from the agony of separation, were walking to and fro upon the velvet turf in front of the old house as the sun sank slowly westward? On the wide waste of waters; the tumbling gray Pacific. They had received several letters from him since he left, and had been much cheered by assurances of his content. That he was buoyantly happy, in the old, selfish sense, was not, perhaps, the case. He had left England and his cherished aspirations far behind. His future was obscure, and could scarcely be called inviting. The shock he had sustained by learning the entire truth about the deaths of Mirabel and the woman he had loved—for Lancaster took him, and him alone, into his confidence—had not yet worn away. And yet he was very, very far from being wretched. It was a profound satisfaction to him to think that he had been able to leave his parents in circumstances of comfort if not of luxury. He was glad to dwell upon the fact that his own life was to be devoted to the relief of suffering and the attempt to bring happiness into the lives of miserable outcasts. And the more these thoughts came home to him—the more fully he realized that he was at last actually started upon a career of *usefulness*, and that his lot was no longer to be one of dreaming, but of *doing*—the greater grew his peace. No morbid introspection, no abstract speculations, not even the adoption of a formal creed, could have brought him that; in honest, arduous work for the good of others, and in that alone, lay the secret which had so long eluded him.

"A fugitive and gracious light he seeks,
 Shy to illumine; *let us seek it too!* *
 This does not come with houses or with gold,
 With place, with honor, and a flattering crew;

* The worshipper of Matthew Arnold will, I trust, forgive the slight verbal alteration here.

'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold—
But the smooth-slipping weeks
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired;
Out of the heed of mortals he is gone;
He wends unfollowed, he must house alone;
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired."

THE END







